



Serving You

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 March 2026

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mahil, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward investment

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment. 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 are 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 Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward investment, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Employment
- Social Regeneration
- Inward Investment
- Markets
- Small Business
- Tourism
- Town Centres

3. Background

3.1 It has been a great year, with many achievements within my portfolio. I would like to start my report by commending the hard work and resilience to the various staff who continue to demonstrate exceptional commitment, resilience, enthusiasm, and care for the residents of Medway, and seeking out and delivering opportunities to benefit their futures.

- 3.2 The Council and its staff have continued to ensure maximum impact within small amounts of funding, despite the financial situation that the Council continues to manage, with a strong focus on exceptional quality.
 - 3.3 Our Economic Development initiatives continue to play a key role in fostering growth and providing support to businesses across Medway. Town Centres remain the vibrant heart of communities, and the Regeneration and Town Centre Teams are instrumental in revitalising and nurturing these essential hubs of activity through key interventions such as Gillingham Taskforce.
 - 3.4 The Skills, Employment & Adult Education service works to ensure residents have the opportunity to improve or develop new skills, to find employment and to access learning via a wide range of programmes, including encouraging apprenticeship growth, providing opportunities for those with barriers and improving careers education in schools.
 - 3.5 The Strategy and Investment team continue to deliver with UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), now well into its fourth year, and they continue to deliver our Levelling up Fund programme focusing on growing the creative sector and providing workspace and jobs. In addition, delivery of the Pride in Place Impact Fund programme of workstreams is underway. A Place Strategy refresh and alignment across the county including Kent and Medway Economic Partnership continues.
4. Providing political leadership and challenge
 - 4.1 My portfolio impacts all residents and communities across Medway, from directly supporting communities, stakeholders, businesses, and organisations, to attracting investment and maximising growth for all, and delivering on our Council priorities. Partnership working is imperative for promoting community engagement and maximising resources to deliver effective services tailored to the needs of residents.
 - 4.2 The Town Centres Board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis working to regenerate the town centres and ensure that key matters that affect them are monitored and progressed. A variety of initiatives and projects have been discussed and advice and strategic direction provided.
5. Championing the Interests of service users Medway residents
 - 5.1 Quarterly meetings with the Business for Medway Board are held representing a range of businesses sectors and sizes across Medway, along with representation from the Federation for Small Business and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce sharing views on how best the Council can support the business community. I attended a previous meeting, hosted by Chatham Maritime Trust, receiving invaluable feedback from a range of local business representatives on our business support provision.

- 5.2 Regular Town Centre Forum meetings continue to provide opportunities for key stakeholders to collaborate and discuss Town Centre issues and input on key initiatives and projects such as events, safety, crime, and local regeneration projects, and more information is included on these in section 6.
- 5.3 Monthly SPF Board meetings are held with delivery partners made up of a diverse group of local organisations, providing a regular forum to strengthen collaboration and encourage synergistic working across Medway. These meetings have played an important role in fostering a culture of innovation, with partners sharing ideas, exploring joint approaches and identifying opportunities to enhance the impact of their projects. I have attended the inaugural meeting where organisations offered valuable insights on community needs and their project delivery including successes and challenges, demonstrating the strong partnerships and creative energy that the SPF programme has helped to build.

6. Support for key service areas

6.1 Town Centres

- 6.1.1 The Town Centres Board has continued to convene, providing strategic oversight of the Council's work to regenerate the town centres. Throughout the year, the Board has reviewed a wide range of regeneration initiatives and development projects, offering valuable guidance, insight, and direction. Discussions have included key schemes such as the Paddock, Waste Strategy, Chatham Street Ambassadors, SPF Funding projects and Pride in Place initiatives.

Gillingham

- 6.1.2 The Council has supported the establishment of a new Gillingham Taskforce, adopting a multi-disciplinary internal and external partnership approach working with key stakeholders to drive forward the regeneration of Gillingham Town Centre. This has been championed by the local MP.
- 6.1.3 In the last twelve months (2024 – 2025), the Gillingham Taskforce has been able to make a positive impact on Gillingham Town Centre, such as:
- Working with Kent Police to ensure increased police presence in the Town Centre to prevent and reduce Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour.
 - Highlight and focus on derelict/vacant properties in Gillingham that have become a magnet for ASB and vagrancy, work with relevant parties to resolve (e.g. forced control of building, developer investment).
 - ANPR on the High Street with 6-month trial to extend the hours of the ANPR cameras due to continued ASB-related parking.
 - Connecting internal services with the work of the MP, local councillors, and the Gillingham Community as a united front for the benefit of Gillingham.

- Facilitate a new Investors and Partners session with businesses with the aim of securing extra funding for Gillingham.
- Continuously assess and review enforcement needs in Gillingham, such as building conditions and planning.
- Maintain and build on the successful Big Day out and Love Gillingham Event, showcasing the positive work with partner agencies and Council services.

6.1.4 In 2024-2025, Medway Council worked with BPTW and Design Southeast to set up the Gillingham Community Panel (GCP) with the aim of co-creating the Gillingham Town Centre Vision and Action Plan. Since the launch of the Vision and Action Plan, the Gillingham Community Panel have become officially constituted and aim to work with the Council, Gillingham Taskforce, and stakeholders as a mechanism of community organising and engagement, to ensure the regeneration of Gillingham Town Centre reflects the needs, views, and values of the communities that utilise it. We work very closely with the GCP for the regeneration of Gillingham, providing updates and opportunities for collaboration on regeneration projects, an upcoming collaboration project is the Railway Bridge mural, which is aimed to be delivered in 2026.

Rainham

6.1.5. The Council has led the relaunch and refresh of the Rainham Town Centre Partnership and initiated the *Rainham Re-imagined* programme – using a co-creation approach to set a path for Rainham’s future regeneration in collaboration with local stakeholders.

6.1.6 The Partnership was refreshed in January 2025 with a new community focused format, moving away from its previous business centric model. Working with the Communications team, an open invitation to the quarterly meetings is now promoted through the Council’s social media channels. Meeting agendas have also been redesigned to appeal to a wider community audience and now include opportunities for networking over light refreshments. As a result, membership has grown to more than 100 participants.

6.1.7 In parallel, the *Rainham Re-imagined* project was launched to invite the public to help redesign the town centre for the future using a co-creation approach. Tuckey Design Studio was commissioned in 2025 to undertake a feasibility study and produce a *Thought Piece*: a reflective guide exploring what matters most to residents, informed by surveys, conversations, place analysis, and community feedback. The *Thought Piece* is now available on the Council’s website and serves as the foundation for the 2026 workstream, which will develop a town centre vision, a costed action plan, and identify delivery routes.

6.1.8 Key projects completed in Rainham include:

- VE Day window installations delivered in partnership with local businesses (May 2025)
- Exploration of new funding opportunities and volunteer support to maintain the A2 Rainham railing planters outside St Margaret's Church (Summer 2025)
- Development of UKSPF project proposals for the 2025/26 financial year (Summer 2025)
- Collaboration with local businesses to maintain additional planters within Rainham Shopping Centre (ongoing)
- 'Around the World' family fun day (August 2025)
- Delivery of a summer youth programme featuring sports and arts camps (August 2025)
- Working with businesses to fund the Rainham Shopping Centre Christmas tree (November 2025)
- Creation of a Christmas windows trail (November 2025)
- Reintroduction of the community Christmas tree light up event (November 2025).

Rochester

6.1.9 The Rochester City Centre Forum continues to meet quarterly and has a well-established governance structure, including a constitution, bank account, and a committee representing local businesses, key stakeholder organisations, and residents. This committee meets between official Forum meetings, and an AGM is held each July to elect members. The Council has continued to support them in their meetings and key projects. Priorities in 2025 included assessing the governance and future of the Rochester Artisan Market, developing the active partnership with the Council's Events Team to support Rochester based festivals and events, and completing the project to replace Rochester's Christmas lights.

Strood

6.1.10 Although the Strood Town Centre Forum did not meet formally in 2025 due to the resignation of the Chair early in the year, several key projects were delivered:

- VE/VJ Day window installations working with local businesses (May 2025)
- A community trolley clear up (July 2025)

- Enhancement of the Strood Community Trail (launched in 2024), with an interactive QR code offering audio information at heritage sites along the route (Summer 2025)
- Design of UKSPF projects for the 2025/26 financial year (Summer 2025)
- Work with the Derelict Properties Officer to improve the shopfront at 75–81 High Street and begin steps toward bringing the properties back into use, including an on-site meeting with owners (July 2025)
- Secured funding for maintenance of additional planters in Friary Place (ongoing)
- Reintroduction of the community Christmas tree light-up event (November 2025)

Chatham:

6.1.11 The Chatham Town Centre Forum has had a break in 2025, concentrating on the development of a Chatham Town Centre Crime Partnership following the feedback on the Chatham BIDS feasibility report 2024/5. The Crime Partnership meets quarterly adopting a multi-disciplinary internal and external partnership approach working with key stakeholders to drive forward and reduce the ASB, shoplifting and perception of crime in Chatham.

6.1.12 One of the outcomes of this partnership is the Chatham Street Ambassadors, an initiative to be the eyes and ears on the High Street providing evidence and intel to the relevant agencies with strengthening business partnerships and community engagement. The Love Chatham continue to deliver the very successful events as in Chatham Carnival, Fun Palace, Super Saturday, scare fest, Christmas Cracker and the recently held Chinese New Year which featured on ITV this weekend. Future workstreams are to look at developing a BID for Chatham with the introduction of street wardens in 2026/27.

6.1.13 Heritage Capacity Building Programme to continue the excellent work of the previous 4-year High Street Heritage Action Programme.

6.1.14 In September, the Historic Places Panel, facilitated by Historic England, were invited by the council to provide advice on Medway's growth and regeneration. There were three key focus areas over the two-day visit, these included looking at how community organisations in Medway can be supported to drive community-led regeneration. They also discussed what approaches should be taken in Medway to ensure that community groups have a meaningful voice in regeneration and growth. The third focus area was around how the built environment industry, including developers, investors, agents and public bodies, can work with community groups to ensure new development is responsive to culture and heritage. The focus on Gillingham and Rainham provided useful discussions on the key priorities that could make up a new heritage strategy for Medway, and how heritage can play a role in delivering future regeneration in Rainham and Gillingham. A report of the Panel's findings and recommendations has recently been published.

6.1.15 Other activities over the year have included supporting development of co-created projects with community partners such as a Heritage Skills workshop, Historic Homeowners retrofit workshop, Urban Room workshops and public realm improvements.

6.2 Markets

6.2.1 Medway's markets continue to play a key role in bringing communities together through the diversity of our traders, products, and the utilisation of the High Street. Gillingham Market operates on a Monday and Saturday in Gillingham High Street and has a wide range of traders selling different products from street food to fruit and veg to bedding and ink cartridges. Traders often see regular customers who come to the market not only to buy products but as a social aspect as the market is often the only reason the customers get to talk to someone that week.

6.2.2 Rochester Farmers Market celebrated its 25th anniversary in September which was a fantastic reminder to how far the markets have progressed and changed over the years, whilst still having some of the same traders and regular customers from when the market began. We have a range of cultures and cuisines represented at the market and continue to enhance this on a regular basis with new traders and current traders launching new products. We celebrate our community through our use of social media to keep our followers updated and have developed a strategy to create conversations on our posts to keep communities involved.

6.2.3 As part of the market's strategy, we have been in communication with a European Market to deliver weekly markets beginning in 2026 at different locations across Medway including the west end of Gillingham High Street to reactivate this space and encourage different communities to come together and celebrate Medway's diversity.

6.2.4 Going forward, we plan to bring more markets to Medway with a focus on different communities and representing audiences who may not have the facilities to begin on their own but would flourish with some support to see them on their journey.

6.3 Small Business

6.3.1 41 years of Medway Business Awards was celebrated in November 2025 at the Corn Exchange, bringing together more than 175 finalists. Eight businesses received awards and were recognised on the night, showcasing the strength and diversity of Medway's business community across a wide range of sectors and industries.

6.3.2 Ascend Coworking is fully open, making up 15,000 square feet of the first floor of the Pentagon with the capacity to host 250 jobs. The occupancy rate at Ascend has increased from three offices occupied last year to twelve offices, twenty-eight hot desks, and twenty-six co-workspaces. Other office spaces are expected to be filled in the upcoming months as negotiations continue with businesses.

- 6.3.3 Our in person 1to1 Business Support contract was renewed for a further four years. In response to growing demand, the service has expanded its team from one adviser to eight. Since the renewal, the Business Advisory Service has delivered 250 face-to-face support sessions, assisting 116 entrepreneurs across a wide range of areas including funding and loan applications, investment support, business planning, startup guidance, and more. A Medway Business Community has also been established, made up of businesses that have engaged with the Advisory Service. Its purpose is to help local businesses thrive while supporting the continued growth and reach of the 1to1 service. To date, six networking events have been delivered to strengthen connections and foster collaboration within the business community.
- 6.3.4 31 fully funded Net Zero Audits have been implemented to assist businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 6.3.5 The value of our Partners for Growth (PFG) grant has been doubled from £1,000 to £2,000 enabling us to offer greater financial support to businesses seeking to grow and innovate. Over the past year, Partners for Growth received 98 grant applications in the past year with a roughly 36% grant approval rate for those looking to start up and grow in Medway. Those that are unsuccessful are guided to our free 1-2-1 business support service for further support with an invite to reapply again in the future.
- 6.3.6 The Partners for Green Growth grant was doubled from £2,500 to £5,000 to help more businesses reduce energy use and improve operational efficiency, enabling business to offset the costs of investing in low-carbon and cost-effective improvements. £20,000 has been awarded in through the scheme, including three businesses that also received a Partners for Growth grant, as well as a joint bid of five companies on Medway City Estate looking to reduce their emissions. Another successful application includes a chocolate manufacturer based in Medway City Estate.
- 6.3.7 The local supply chain continues to be supported by making connections with networking events such as Medway Business Meetup, Business for Medway and joint events with the Federation for Small Business.
- 6.3.8 84% percent of the respondents in this year's Medway annual business survey stated that Medway is a good place to do business, despite some of the challenges faced.
- 6.3.9 Medway Business and Skills Showcase will be held again for the third year in a row in June at the Dockyard following on from the success of previous years. To manage its growth and scale an external provider has been handed ownership of the event, with close support and collaboration from the Council.
- 6.3.10 Local business events continue to be supported such as the ZC Live, World Class Medway, and Women in Business Expo. In addition, our Economic Development Team continues to provide support to Climate Change, Skills

Team and Public Health in business outreach alongside Corn Exchange, Brook Theatre and St Johns Church, for potential new revenue streams and business case analysis.

6.3.11 The regional digital technology and manufacturing industry grant and support scheme 'Made Smarter Adoption' has been developed and continues to be implemented this year.

6.4 Investment

6.4.1 Levelling Up Fund £14.4m investment in our Chatham Package of cultural projects continue to progress. The Fitted Rigging House South project delivered by the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust is complete and fully occupied. It houses a diverse mix of commercial tenants, in respect of both sector and size, ranging from charities to subsidiaries of large multinational PLCs.

6.4.2 The Docking Station in partnership with the University of Kent is in construction with completion of both phases of work expected November 2026. The project restores a historic building at the Historic Dockyard Chatham into a unique hub providing industry-standard production technologies including virtual production and motion capture enabling local businesses, students and communities to develop new skills in immersive technologies and supporting the digital creative industries in Medway and the region.

6.4.3 The Brook Theatre refurbishment is underway.

6.4.4 The Council was granted £1.5m Pride in Place Impact Fund. Following a stakeholder engagement event, MP support and Cabinet approval in January, the three workstreams are now underway. A shopfront grant scheme to repair, renew and refresh shopfronts has been launched across Medway and is currently live for applications. A Partners in Investment scheme to unlock significant private sector investment is underway to redevelop an asset in our town centres. A public realm scheme is being worked up to deliver improvements across Chatham and Gillingham. All workstreams are on track to deliver at pace and commit funds by MHCLG timescales.

6.4.5 Following March 2025 Cabinet's decision to deliver a mix of industrial and mid-tech (office and research) commercial space on Innovation Park Medway, for the Northern site, procurement of a development partner is now underway, with an interim use of the site until 2028 under a lease.

6.4.6 For Southern Site the development of a viable care home and older persons units is underway with RIBA 1 presented to Cabinet in July 2025 and funding for the scheme agreed by Full Council in November 2025.

6.5 Strategy

- 6.5.1 External funding was secured to continue the refresh of the Council's overarching Place Strategy. Work has begun and consultants BTPW have supported the new iteration of Medway's Place Strategy, Medway 2041. It builds on the strong foundations already established in Medway 2037 but is more ambitious in both its scope and intent. The document still aims to be user-friendly and accessible, though it is more detailed, more purposeful, and clearer about what we are trying to achieve as a place and why. The first draft is now firmly aligned with the emerging Local Plan and is underpinned by a strong evidence base. It is data-led, spatially focused and supported by clearer visual mapping to help articulate our priorities across Medway. The strategic vision provides the basis for funding bids to attract investment into Medway and to deliver projects for the benefit of our residents, communities and businesses.
- 6.5.2 The draft Medway 2041 aims to draw together the breadth of strategic work happening across the organisation, referencing and aligning with the many strategies and programmes already being delivered across services. This refresh aims to create a coherent framework that brings work together under a shared place narrative, from a Regeneration perspective. The refresh has been developed with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and devolution in mind. As Medway plans for growth, a clear place framework is required to lead, one that is robust enough to expand and evolve, incorporating new geographies and opportunities over time.
- 6.5.3 The work programme and engagement is underway and following formal approval, is on track to produce a published document in 2026/27.
- 6.5.4 The Place Strategy is underpinned by various existing and emerging strategies including the Local Plan, Town Centre Strategy, Skills & Employment Plan amongst many others. The Council works closely with Kent County Council and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, ensuring alignment with the emerging Kent and Medway Growth Plan, priority sectors and established Kent and Medway Economic Framework.
- 6.5.5 All skills work is driven by key strategies, notably the Skills & Employability Plan for Medway, which sets out the key priorities and action plan for delivery. This year on a Kent & Medway wide basis, two new key strategies have been developed. The Kent & Medway Work & Health strategy focuses on improving health and employment outcomes by supporting individuals with long-term health conditions and disabilities to start, stay, and succeed in work. The Get Kent & Medway Working Plan focuses on reducing economic inactivity, by removing barriers to the workplace. Both strategies have been launched in 2025 and guide the work of the Skills & Employment team. Medway Council has contributed significantly to both strategies.

6.6 Social Regeneration

- 6.6.1 The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) Year 4 delivery is underway following a £606,682 allocation of funds to extend the SPF programme by an additional Year. The primary goal of the SPF programme is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. To maximise the impact of the funding received Medway Council implemented an innovative methodology to deliver this funding, involving the development and implementation of an open application process that empowers all local organisations in Medway with the opportunity to gain funding for with their own project ideas, resulting in projects that are led by our local community groups serving the specific localised needs of each of our communities.
- 6.6.2 After rigorous assessment and moderation, successful projects are awarded funding. Across all four years of delivery projects have focused on enhancing local community infrastructure, developing the capacity of our local communities and groups, encouraging the exploration of the Medway Towns and supporting local businesses.
- 6.6.3 SPF Year 4 was launched at a successful launch event held at Ascend Coworking, Pentagon Centre, Chatham on 31st March 2025. The event was attended by over 80 local stakeholders and interested parties. Over a six-week application window, over 70 applications were received, assessed and moderated with 48 of them resulting in successful projects. The SPF Year 4 projects include:
- AE Creative Hub – A+E Lab Art & Tech Programme
 - Emanations Ltd – AI for All: Unlocking Potential
 - Pilot Generative AI Ltd – Eddy AI FLOW
 - Future Coders SE – App Library
 - Electric Medway – Forest Keep
 - Creative Medway – Targeted Creative Sector Business Support
 - Wordsmithery – Medway River Lit: Rippling Out Further
 - Medway Play Lab – Play Lab Readers & Writers Club
 - Mrs Baker’s Medway Theatre Company Ltd – Medway Mini Talks
 - Funny Women – Comedy in the Community
 - Ideas Test – Luton Lights 2026
 - LV21 – Access Upgrade Programme
 - Mess Room CIC – River Medway Journeys
 - Icon Theatre – Brook Theatre Community Programming Feasibility Study
 - Cement Fields – A Year Long Feast: The Hoo Heddern
 - Emerge Advocacy – Emerge Advocacy in Medway
 - Help in the Community/Medway Foodbank - Financial Inclusion Project
 - Medway Plus – Discovering Medway Again
 - Mutual Aid Road Reps – Fighting Loneliness & Isolation with MARR
 - Opportunities with Experience – Tradeswomen Led Pop-Up Upcycling Café
 - Second Chance Medway – Second Chance Community Centre
 - Sunlight Centre – A study of Place, People and Produce of Medway
 - Volunteer It Yourself – Frindsbury Cricket Club Improvements

- Medway Language Café CIC – Employability Skills
- AJD Solutions – Love Where You Live
- AMAT UK – Women Experiencing or at Risk of Homelessness Arts and Homelessness International – Made in Medway
- Medway Voluntary Action – Volunteering Opportunities
- Medway African and Caribbean Association – A Cultural & Heritage Archive for Medway
- No Bad Days Limited – No Bad Days Mindfulness Day
- Slough Fort Preservation Trust – Lecture & Education Room
- Medway Council in Partnership with Friends of Cozenton Park Community Tree Nursery – Community Tree Nursery
- The Octopus Foundation – The Cre8 Shed Project
- Rochester Cathedral – Unlocking the Heritage Community Garden
- Fort Amherst Heritage Trust – Medway Control Group
- The Medway Experience – The Medway Element
- Medway Rugby Football Club – Facilities Upgrade Project Phase 1
- Kent Crusaders Basketball Club – Empowering Young People through Basketball
- Medway Council Sports Team – The 72nd International Dance Festival
- Oral History Medway – Gillingham FC ‘Pop-Up’ Museum
- Zigzag Scrapstore – Scrapstore Connections
- The Halpern Charitable Foundation – Chinese New Year Festival ’26
- Medway Council Libraries Team - People of Medway
- Rochester City Centre Forum – Christmas Lights Legacy
- Chatham Town Centre Forum – Town Centre Projects
- Gillingham Town Centre Forum – Town Centre Projects
- Strood Town Centre Forum – Town Centre Projects
- Rainham Town Centre Forum – Town Centre Projects

6.6.4 All Year 4 projects are currently underway and are making significant progress on their delivery, with some projects having already concluded after successful delivery. SPF Board meetings are continuing to occur monthly, and in which all delivery partners provide updates to the board on progress and complete their monthly reporting.

6.6.5 Across Years 1-3 of the SPF Programme 101 projects were delivered and across those projects 246,727 people were directly impacted by the programme of works, with 741 organisations having directly received non-financial support, and 270 events or participatory programmes took place. In addition to this, 8 premises across Medway were rehabilitated as a result of capital funding, with 108 facilities and amenities being created or supported through this programme. The figures above only provide a very high-level summation of what was achieved throughout this programme, and do not capture the transformative impact this programme has had on Medway’s local communities and the impact it has had on catalysing our local groups into driving forward pride in place all across Medway.

6.6.6 The quantitative successes detailed above will only increase as reporting and data is compiled on the Year 4 programmes 48 projects, which will continue

the ongoing and resounding success of the SPF programme.

6.7 Medway Innovation Centres

6.7.1 The Innovation Studio Medway (ISM), constructed from storage containers with 15 offices and 17 storage units is regularly fully occupied. This site attracts local businesses that need storage and office space and is marketed towards trades such as electricians, plumbing and security contractors as well as locals attracted by the location of the site in proximity to public transport, Rochester and the river.

6.7.2 The Innovation Centre Medway (ICM) has 54 offices which are regularly fully occupied supporting a wide range of businesses, from support services like accountants, lawyers, IT and recruitment professionals to more delivery-based operations such as bomb disposal, engineering, and property development. The ICM is also a meeting venue for ICM and ISM tenants, driver's courses and council services. The ICM Café is valued by existing tenants and is a key attraction for prospective tenants - it is well used by tenants and event users, and also attracts regular custom from nearby airport staff, contributing positively to footfall and the overall appeal of the centre.

6.8 Skills

6.8.1 Through our work with the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC), Enterprise Advisers and our Careers Consultants have been working with secondary schools to improve the quality and breadth of their career's strategies and programmes. Enterprise Advisers are senior leaders from the world of work; Careers Consultants coordinate the bridge between the world of work and careers education.

6.8.2 All eligible secondary educational institutions across Medway are in the Kent & Medway Careers Hub including the college, SEND schools and alternative provisions. This year we have launched a conference for Careers Leaders across Kent & Medway, with a focus on changes to statutory guidance, Gatsby Benchmark changes and readying the system for the new modern work experience programme. Medway Careers Consultants have piloted an internal leadership review with two schools, which explores distributing leadership of careers whilst creating a quality assurance framework for all careers activity. Across the year we have had excellent engagement from all educational institutions, who have regularly completed their careers assessment – Compass Plus. Careers Consultants organised a SEND inclusive careers fair, hosted by MidKent College, with over 140 students attending with 23 employers and providers.

6.8.3 At the end of academic year 25/26 our Gatsby Benchmark scores are an average of 6.2 benchmarks achieved, higher than the national average

of 6.0 and up from 6.0 last year.

- 6.8.4 Connect to Work, a new largescale employment programme has been successfully launched. To date there have been 942 starts on programme across Kent & Medway, with 111 of them being Medway starts, in line with the DWP target of 14%. Although early in the programme, 10 people in Medway have received first earnings due to work. A huge amount of engagement work has taken place, opening new referral routes, with partners including JCP and health providers. Employer engagement is under way, with more planned.
- 6.8.5 With funding from the National Development Team for Inclusion, we have led the creation of a Supported Internship forum, designed to bring key stakeholders together to further Supported Internships in Medway. This year we have successfully held a Supported Internship Graduation event and a Supported Internship Conference for professionals, with close to 100 attendees.
- 6.8.6 The Medway Apprenticeship Advice Service (MAAS) continues to offer support, we have set up an Independent Training Provider forum, with an accompanying action plan to improve our coordination with the world of training. The MAAS has recently joined the National Apprenticeship Hub to learn from other areas what works well in promoting apprenticeships, share good practice and stay up to date with national updates. There is currently Kent and Medway wide activity looking at how we can further grow apprenticeships in the region, this is being coordinated by the Kent & Medway Employment Taskforce.
- 6.8.7 In partnerships with Regeneration, Medway Development Company and O'Halloran and O'Brien we have launched a new construction training programme. It is for at least 100 people across 2026, with one course running every month. It's open to Medway residents, with a focus on those who are unemployed, 16–18-year-old NEETs and Care Leavers. Training for CSCS is included alongside other useful qualifications such as Manual Handling and Working at Height. The first two courses have been filled and already three people have secured jobs in construction.
- 6.8.8 Broader employer engagement continues to go well, with businesses completing our tailored Skills & Employment Plans. So far, we have 48 completed, which detail areas of interest and need, alongside an action plan.
- 6.9 Tourism
- 6.9.1 Over the past year, significant officer and political capacity has been dedicated to managing the consequences of the liquidation of Visit Kent and supporting the establishment of a new service in partnership with Kent County

Council. While this has required substantial time and focus, the current year has marked the beginning of a positive rebuild for Medway's visitor economy service. This includes in depth conversations with the sector, Councillor Mahil securing a modest but important investment back into the service to fund sector support, governance capacity and the development of a new Destination Management Plan, and initial improvements to the Visit Medway website alongside a full review of its structure and functionality.

- 6.9.2 Reestablishment of Visit Kent - The newly restructured Visit Kent team is now in place and working at pace to relaunch the countywide visitor economy service. Immediate priorities include reintroducing a credible and coordinated voice for Kent and Medway's tourism sector, supported by refreshed branding, a new website presence, strengthened stakeholder engagement and clear messaging about the shared tourism offer. A phased communications plan is in progress, including a hold email to partners in December, a formal launch press release in January and relaunch activity targeted at both trade and consumer audiences through early 2026.
- 6.9.3 Destination Management Plan - A revised Kent Destination Management Plan for 2026 to 2031 is being prepared. This is informed directly by feedback from Medway and Kent stakeholders, new insights, local government reorganisation considerations, and the resources available within the streamlined team. The plan will set shared priorities for growth and provide a robust framework for lobbying, investment and coordinated destination activity. Insights will be central to the new service, with economic impact modelling, perception research and ongoing business performance monitoring shaping decision making and advocacy on behalf of the sector.
- 6.9.4 Commercial Partnership Model - Visit Kent is introducing a simplified and more transparent commercial partnership model. The structure is scalable, with benefits aligned to the level of engagement and investment from partners. The model aims to deliver sustainable visitor economy income that is ring fenced for countywide delivery, while ensuring clear return on investment and regular reporting to contributors. All Kent and Medway visitor economy businesses, regardless of size, will continue to have free access to baseline support including listings, newsletters, resources, and opportunities to participate in campaigns and consultations.
- 6.9.5 Marketing and Sector Engagement - Early consumer marketing priorities include rebuilding high engagement social media content, launching thematic mini guides on the interim website and preparing the South East Local Enterprise Partnership funded Kent Coast campaign for spring 2026. Business to business activity is equally active, with trade newsletters, renewed travel trade relationships, and a spring networking event in development. The service will also progress Local Visitor Economy Partnership accreditation with VisitEngland, subject to capacity and

resources.

- 6.9.6 Implications for Medway - For Medway, the new Visit Kent service offers a more focused, insight led and accountable framework for promoting the area, engaging local businesses and aligning with countywide activity. With a clearer emphasis on measurable impact, stronger advocacy and improved coordination, Medway is well positioned as the new Destination Management Plan and refreshed partnership structures are finalised. The investment secured by Cllr Mahil provides essential local capacity to complement this countywide activity and ensures that Medway's interests, priorities, and visitor economy assets continue to be championed.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. I continue to be fully supportive of the services and work which is being undertaken in challenging circumstances and determined for the progress in achieving growth for our residents and communities to continue.

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Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.