

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support and Digital Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 29 January 2026

6.30pm to 8.30pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Tejan (Chairperson), Hamilton (Vice-Chairperson), Bowen, Brake, Hackwell BEM, Lammas, Lawrence, McDonald, Nestorov, Pearce and Mark Prenter

Substitutes: Councillors:
Myton (Substitute for Browne)
Nestorova (Substitute for Jones)

In Attendance: Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer
Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services
Andy McNally-Johnson, Head of Corporate Accounts
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer
Councillor Zoë Van Dyke, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

681 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Browne and Jones.

682 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 was amended to include the attendance of Councillor Lammas and agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

683 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

684 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI)

There were none.

Other significant Interests (OSI)

There were none.

Other Interests

There were none.

685 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder commented that she was pleased to present the report to Committee and the 5% pay increase which was awarded to staff in April 2025.

The following issues were discussed:

Financial stability – in response to a question whether Council remained financially stable, the Portfolio Holder stated that the administration had inherited a difficult financial situation. It was vital that Council provided services to residents and the request for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) was made to support delivering those services.

A Member asked whether the proposed £2m additional funding for the department in the budget showed that the Portfolio Holder had not been successful in achieving efficiencies, the Portfolio Holder stated that the monies in the proposed budget was required to provide services to the residents of Medway.

Pay increase 2026-27 – it was asked whether the pay award in the last two years and the proposed pay award for the next financial year would continue in the future. The Portfolio Holder stated that it was important to remember that the Council had previously had to employ expensive locum staff and the pay award had helped to alleviate recruitment and retention issues. She was proud of the proposed pay award which reflected a cost of living increase and that 80% of staff were Medway residents.

Telephone queries from residents – it was asked if it was known which department received the most queries and what the demographic profile of residents so the Council could ensure services remained accessible to all residents. The Chief Information Officer explained that it was known which departments received the most queries, however, the personal details of residents were not currently collected so the profile of callers was not tracked. The Council was developing a new platform to support customer management systems and data could be collected through the resident's account in the future.

In response to a question whether there was any data available whether the reduction in phone calls to the Council was due to residents being unable to

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contact the Council by phone, the Chief Information Officer stated that the reduction in phone calls was due to residents using digital services to find Council information. The fall in phone calls has freed up telephone lines for residents who prefer to call regarding their query so they received an improved service. He added that the Council had not reduced the number of phone lines open to the public and had no plans to do so.

A Member commented that calls to the Council had fallen by around a third in the last two years. It was asked which departments had seen that largest falls and the reasons for this, the Chief Information Officer stated that the largest fall had been in the switchboard number which dealt with calls where residents did not have a direct number or were not aware of who they needed to speak to. This was due to the improved function of digital services which enabled those queries to be answered easily and quickly online.

It was asked whether there were any savings associated with the move to more residents accessing services digitally and had any provision been made in the budget for an increased load on ICT services such as cyber security as a consequence, the Portfolio Holder undertook to provide an answer regarding resources following the meeting. The Chief Operating Officer added that in terms of cyber security, the system was under constant review of the threats and required security updates were undertaken immediately. In addition, training for all staff was undertaken alongside this as the biggest risk factor was often human error.

Complaint Awareness training – in response to a question whether the training was commissioned because of an identified issue with feedback to staff regarding complaints, the Chief Information Officer stated the sessions were awareness training for staff in how to handle complaints correctly within the policy.

Blue Badges – A Member thanked the blue badges team for the excellent work they have provided during the year.

Locum and casual staff – in response to a question how many locum contracts had been agreed in the last year, the Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that over 100 new locum contracts had been agreed in the past year and the total number of locum staff currently employed by the Council, stood at 154, this did not include the number of casual staff which represented a different cohort.

Anti-Fraud – it was asked how many cases of fraud that were investigated by the Council progressed to criminal proceedings. The Portfolio Holder undertook to provide detailed figures following the meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report.

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- b) The Committee requested a briefing on the number of fraud cases which were progressed to legal proceedings.
- c) The Committee requested a briefing note regarding the savings through increased use of digital services and lower call volumes to the CABS service over the last 12 months.

686 One Medway Council Plan 2024-2028 Key Performance Indicator Refresh 2026-27

Discussion:

The Chief Information Officer introduced the report which outlined proposed amendments to the One Medway Council Plan for 2026-27. He highlighted that the majority of indicators remained unchanged, 24 amendments were proposed to reflect current performance, 11 indicators would be removed because data was no longer available or relevant and seven new indicators were proposed.

The following issues were discussed:

Delegation to the Chief Executive – the Committee discussed the proposed delegation to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to agree new key performance indicators. A Member raised concern that the delegation to officers could enable indicators to be amended to provide a more favourable outlook for the Council. He added that in his view the ability to change indicators should be reserved to the Committee.

The Chief Information Officer stated that changes to the indicators had been brought to the Committee for consideration to ensure transparency. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the report was considered as part of pre-decision scrutiny, so any comments by the Committee would be noted and if Members did not want the Chief Executive to have the delegation that could be considered and voted upon at full Council.

The Chief Operating Officer added that the purpose of the delegation to the Chief Executive was to add new measures to reflect changes in priorities or schemes during the year. The delegation did not provide authority to the Chief Executive to remove targets, and performance was presented to the relevant Committees on a quarterly basis with complete transparency in relation to all targets.

A recommendation was proposed to note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's concern that the Chief Executive had a delegation to amend indicators. On being put to the vote, the recommendation was lost.

Scrutiny and Review – in response to a question whether the development and scrutiny of key performance indicators reflected best practice, the Chief Information Officer stated that the development and scrutiny of performance was open and transparent and this reflected good practice.

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Business Creation – It was asked for further information to support the amended target for KPI 2.2 business creation which had been reduced from 8,000 to 4,000 new businesses over the Council Plan period. The Chief Information Officer undertook to provide a response from the service following the meeting.

A Member commented that there was not a specific indicator which related to the survival of small businesses and inward investments to the areas high streets, it was asked if further information could be provided as to how the Council measured investment into the high street and the survival of businesses. The Chief information Officer stated that whilst there was some indicators relating to regeneration there was not a specific indicator for inward investment in high streets and business survival, he undertook to request a briefing note from the service on the current situation.

Swimming – in response to a question regarding the numbers of young people swimming and whether this had been affected by the decision to remove free swimming, the Chief Information Officer explained the target KPI 4.14 was to increase swimming by 5% year on year, to achieve the target of 15% of young people accessing swimming lessons by the by 2027-28. He would request further information regarding the detailed performance from the service.

A Member requested further information in relation to littering in their ward. The Chief Information Officer undertook to request the service to provide that information following the meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee considered the proposed changes to the key performance indicators that will be used to track performance of the One Medway Council Plan in 2026/27 as set out in appendix 1 and section 3.7 and submitted comments to Cabinet as set out above.
- b) The Committee noted that Council will be requested to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree new key performance indicators and interim targets where applicable as set out in paragraph 3.8 of the report.
- c) The Committee requested further information regarding the performance in relation to ward level performance regarding littering.

687 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2026/27

Discussion:

The Head of Revenue Accounts introduced the report which had been presented to the Committee in November and been updated to reflect the comments of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees which could be found at appendix 1 to the report. He added that the Local Government Finance settlement had been announced in December which was the first year of a multi

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year settlement. The settlement was positive for Medway, however, the benefits of the settlement would not be felt until years two and three of the settlement. In 2026-27 the Council would receive £8m less than was originally forecasted. The final settlements would be received by the Council shortly and incorporated into the report provided to Full Council.

The following issues were discussed:

Council Finances – The Chief Operating Officer was asked for his assessment of the Council's finances in light of the proposed £8m less income from central government than was forecast and the need for further Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) when it had been the aim of the administration for no further EFS to be sought. It was asked whether the positive forecasts previously provided had been unrealistic. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the budget gap had been reduced from £26m in November, however, funding from central government was £8m lower than had been forecast.

The Chief Operating Officer explained that the forecast had been made with the help of advisors based on previous government announcements. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the modelling had been positive, however, the phasing of the settlement over the three-year period meant that there was a lower than anticipated level of funding in year one. When the Cabinet budget report was published in February, the three year projection would show increased funding to Medway to be received in years two and three of the settlement.

The Cabinet budget report, when published, would highlight that following significant work by Portfolio Holders and senior managers, the budget gap would be reduced to around £10.2m for the coming financial year. This gap would require an application for further EFS.

Current year budget Overspend – it was asked to what extent the overspend on the current year had impacted on the budget for the next financial next year. The Chief Operating Officer explained that there were two significant areas of overspend for the current financial year, being Treasury Management and Adult Social Care. Each year the budget was built on a set of assumptions, for Adult Social Care external factors such as the pressure on the NHS and its subsequent effect on adult social care were greater than had been anticipated and that would impact next years budget. With regard to Treasury Management, whilst interest rates had fallen, the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rate had not fallen in line with predictions made by treasury advisors in November 2024. This had created a pressure in terms of higher interest rate costs, this pressure will also continue into the next financial year.

Capital Strategy – further information was requested regarding the Capital Strategy which included a number of schemes which were not reflected in the draft budget. The Head of Revenue Accounts stated further information would be published shortly in relation to the Capital Programme. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Capital Strategy outlined the Council's aspirations to

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invest in its assets, however the Capital Programme referred to the affordability to undertake those schemes.

General Reserves – it was asked if the Council intended to grow its reserves in the next financial year. The Head of Revenue Accounts confirmed this had been removed from the proposed budget and the medium-term financial outlook due to financial pressures the Council currently faced. The Chief Operating Officer added that increasing reserves remained an ambition, however, given the financial pressures it was not possible to increase general reserves at this time.

Further information was requested regarding how the budget gap for next year and the overspend for this year had been reduced. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the information was very detailed and advised Members to review the draft budget and monitoring reports which would be published as part of the Cabinet papers on Monday 2 February for further information.

Medway 2.0 - in response to a question whether officers were confident the savings in budget identified in Medway 2.0 would be realised, the Chief Operating Officer stated that he was confident that the projected savings would be realised, and progress would be reported to this Committee during the year. In addition, Medway 2.0 would contribute to delivering further savings made across the Council which would be reported directly by the service.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to reduce the budget deficit for 2026/27 and to liaise with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to secure support through the Exceptional Financial Support scheme, should it be necessary.
- b) The Committee submitted comments and comments from the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees to Cabinet.

688 Risk Strategy Annual Review

Discussion:

The Chief Information Officer introduced the report, he highlighted the principal changes to the strategy which include the re-establishment of the Corporate Risk Management Group

It was noted by Members that the Audit Committee had previously considered the report.

Decision:

The Committee considered the 2026/27 Risk Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report and submitted comments to Cabinet.

689 Staff Survey 2025 Results

Discussion:

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer introduced the report. The Staff Survey had been undertaken during the summer of 2025 and the results shared with the Corporate Management Team, Service Managers and the Employment Matters Committee during October and November. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer highlighted some areas where the survey had shown positive results the Council.

The Behaviours and Values the Council set for staff were well understood with 90% of respondents stating they knew what this meant to them and how to implement in their working day. There had also been a 15% rise in colleagues feeling empowered, a 10% rise in colleagues feeling proud to work at Medway and a 17.5% rise in colleagues satisfied with the rewards package.

The Chief Organisational Culture Officer added there were some areas which required improvement, in particular. 5.8% of staff felt they could not be themselves at work, and 6.7% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Areas which required improvement were being addressed.

The following issues were discussed:

Discrimination and Harassment - a Member commented that there were some very positive results in the survey but also some results which would raise concerns, such as the 22% of respondents did not know how to report discrimination and harassment. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated policies were easily available on the intranet and in clear language so further investigation was undertaken into the potential causes for the results. At engagement sessions with staff, some officers reported having a concern but wanting advice rather than to raise a formal complaint with their manager or HR. In response officers was considering ways in which that could be addressed to signpost staff to effective advice.

Staff Retention – in response to a question how important was staff pay in securing retention of staff the Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the staff turnover rate had fallen from 16.5% to around 11% in the last two years. It was her ambition to have a turnover rate of 10% which would reflect bringing in new people with fresh ideas and developing staff in their career pathway. She stated that in her opinion, the staff reward package had been a contributing factor to both the improved retention rate and the Council's ability to recruit. In addition, the Medpay review had enabled staff to progress and in their career at the Council and this had a made a significant difference to the stability of the workforce.

Comparator data was requested to from other authorities to compare the numbers of staff who reported wanting to leave in the next two years. The Chief

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Organisational Culture Officer stated there was no comparable data with other local authorities available on that specific issue as the surveys were not a set of standardised questions and the results of internal authority surveys were not always made publicly available. She added that one of the reasons why a number of people planned to leave the Council in the next two years was because there was a large cohort coming up to retirement age. Another reason was that the many staff wanted to progress their careers and were in roles where internal advancement opportunities were limited.

It was asked how the Council could be sure that pay was a determining factor in retention when the Council did not have data on what was happening elsewhere. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the Council benchmarked their pay and rewards packages against other authorities and reviewed their retention data to ensure it was in line with the market. Prior to the pay review the Council was not in line with the market and it did not want to return to this position, She added that the proposed pay increase for the forthcoming year was linked to inflation.

The Chief Operating Officer added that for a number of years the Council's pay award had not risen in line with inflation and pay was cited as a major reasons for staff leaving. In the last two years pay had risen, the Medpay review had been undertaken and staff no longer cited pay as the major reason for leaving. As a result the Council was now considering other ways to improve retention.

Bullying – it was asked what initiatives had been put in place to deal with the bullying issues identified in the report. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the Council had a robust reporting system and policies in place with officers acting as champions to provide support. Following further investigation the data had shown that it was not a Council wide issue but focused on isolated teams. Additional work was being put in place such as training regarding unintentional language and behaviour that caused distress.

Local Government Reform (LGR) – it was asked how the Council planned to do deal with staff anxiety caused by LGR. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the Council had a working group and a policy unit which was looking at issues related to LGR. Events had been held at a senior management level to consider those concerns and all staff events have been held with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive Officer. The Council sought to provide reassurance that whilst the result of the LGR was not known, it remained the case that majority of staff would be retained on the same terms and conditions. From a HR perspective, some comparison of terms and conditions with other authorities was taking place so the Council could be aware of risks and opportunities at an early stage, this mapping included retention levels within authorities which may form part of the successor authority.

It was asked whether staff had made clear how they wished to be engaged regarding LGR and whether unions had been consulted. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that the staff survey included questions on preferred methods of communication regarding LGR and this included briefings

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and the HR newsletter. Communication with Unions took place on a fortnightly basis and there were opportunities for more formal engagement with unions through the Corporate Consultative Committee and the Joint Consultative Committee.

A Member commented that there were a number of positive results and thanked officers for their hard work. It was asked what support the Council would provide to Officers whilst planned works on Gun Wharf took place. The Chief Organisational Culture Officer stated that HR were working with Service Managers to identify their desk allocation requirements and the Council was considering other venues where staff could be relocated if they had difficulties working from home. The Council had experience of supporting staff who had barriers to working from home during previous Gun Wharf repair works.

It was asked whether the Committee should receive reports in relation to LGR and the work that was being undertaken. The Chief Operating Officer stated that reports would be brought to Committees in the future, but that would take place following the government decision in the summer. There was for example a report programmed to be considered by Employment Matters Committee in the future which could also be considered by the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

690 Work Programme

Decision:

- a) The Committee agreed the provisional work programme at Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the work programmes of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees at Appendix 2 to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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