

Public Questions

Question A – William Burvill of Strood, asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

“Does the Leader of the Council have full confidence in the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services and in the performance of Medway Children’s Services?”

In giving his answer he should explain to residents why he believes the service is performing effectively and delivering the high standard of support, safeguarding and accountability that Medway’s children and families deserve.”

In response the Leader stated that for the avoidance of doubt, he had full confidence in all nine of his Cabinet colleagues. However as he had been asked specifically about one part of the Council, he absolutely had strong confidence in Councillor Adam Price, the only statutorily required Cabinet Member, and indeed the senior management of that department - the Director of Children and Adult Services, and the two assistant directors he had worked with in that particular role, current and previous, both of whom had added value and better outcomes to this organisation.

He further stated that he had a long list to read through so would just give the highlights where he felt progress could be shown as being made: a number of staff had gone from being temporary and locum staff to permanent staff which was something the administration had said it wanted to do and had done; senior roles had been permanently recruited to for the first time in several years; technology advances such as the Magic Notes pilot, around using technology to get better outcomes both for the professionals but most importantly for the children and their families and carers; the fact that we have of course received a good Ofsted, the first in the history of Medway Council, and that regular meetings continued, building on that work further. He added that it was worth recognising in previous iterations of this Council when one step forward had been made in in Ofsted inspections, budgets had then been cut. That was a statement of fact. He stated that this administration had taken the alternative approach, continuing to do that and investing. However it was not just about investment, it was about quality of service, and the Council continued to have strong outcomes when it came to care leavers. Communication had continued directly with both service users and professionals within the service.

He added that a number of Cabinet Members, including himself and the Chief Executive were going out to see firsthand safeguarding meetings to triangulate the information which was trusted and known to be accurate. There was nothing better than seeing that directly and it had been a privilege to be invited into families’ homes, sometimes in the most difficult of situations, to observe the Council’s work.

The Council continued to work closely and carefully with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Again, a phrase that the Council tried not to use for the young refugees, who were some of the most vulnerable people in the community and the Council wanted to ensure that they were getting the support they needed at such a vulnerable time. Caseloads were currently more manageable. There was more work to do, but the numbers had been coming down and ultimately this was about

ensuring that children's services continued playing their part in the wider corporate vision, corporate values for Medway Council or indeed making sure that individual families, parents and children.

The Leader finished by stating that the Council was not complacent, nor were Portfolio Holders, nor senior management. There was always more to do and it was worth remembering that this has happened at a time when the other upper tier authority in this region had seen a backwards step in their Ofsted for children services.

William Burvill asked the following supplementary question.

“Thank you and you have just told the chamber that Medway Children's Services are performing effectively overall. So on the 28 May, a final hearing involving a Medway child was rendered ineffective because the author of the Section 7 report for Medway Children's Services did not attend court. The family court found at Medway it could not make a robust final order that the parties could not receive a fair hearing without it from the social worker and reminded itself this is in the court papers that the magistrate said that the day indeed has generally harmful to a child in Medway. As a result, the hearing has been adjourned for a further two months and will now be held in Canterbury. How can you describe Medway's children services as delivering a high standard of support, safeguarding and accountability when Medway's family court was forced to adjourn a child's case because the department failed. Will you please look into this, maybe even commission an investigation into how this happened and ensure it will never happen again to a child in Medway. I am willing to provide the relevant court documentation confidentially to the Director of Children and Adult's Services if required.”

In response the Leader advised that he could not comment on an individual case in public, but that was exactly why there was a complaints process and he would encourage anybody and that individual family, if they felt that the system had not worked for them, to take this up with the complaints process. Ultimately if they were not satisfied, they could then access the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

However, he did of course not know the individual circumstances around this case, but a service for 63,000 young people could not be based on one individual case. Democratic Services would ensure the relevant website page to make that first Stage 1 complaint was forwarded.

Question B – Matthew Broadley of Chatham had submitted the Portfolio Holder of Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration Councillor Curry, the following:

“Can the Council confirm how many cross-pavement charging solutions (e.g. a cable channel) have been applied for and approved since the scheme started in March 2024?

In giving your response, you should include how Medway Council compares to other local Councils.”

Councillor Curry took this question in the absence of Councillor Paterson, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement.

Councillor Curry advised that since March 2024, Medway Council had received several enquiries regarding cross-pavement charging solutions but had not approved any requests. This was because Medway had taken a clear and consistent position to not support cross-pavement charging at the present time. This approach reflected a deliberate choice to prioritise a strategic, borough-wide EV charging network rather than piecemeal, property-by-property solution.

Medway had just concluded its procurement activity for its on-street charging programme, backed by £2.14m of LEVI funding and substantial private investment. Allowing cross-pavement charging now would risk undermining that investment and weaken the negotiating position with the market.

Medway also faced practical constraints that many other authorities did not. The lamp columns were positioned at the back of the footway, meaning they could not be used as safe connection points, as any cable laid across the pavement would create a hazard and conflict with our statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 to keep the highway safe and unobstructed.

Medway's stance was far from unusual. A significant number of Councils across the country had chosen not to support cross-pavement charging, citing:

- safety and liability concerns;
- risks of simultaneous contact between neighbouring users;
- misunderstandings around parking rights outside homes;
- social equity issues for residents without driveways.

Whilst a small number of authorities were trialling cable channels, many, particularly those with similar footway layouts or safety constraints, had taken the same position as Medway. Recent national webinars and sector discussions confirmed that Councils were divided, and there was no national consensus that cross-pavement charging was the right solution.

Medway remained committed to supporting residents in the transition to electric vehicles. The most effective way to do that was through a comprehensive, affordable, publicly accessible charging network, not through individual domestic arrangements that could compromise safety or investment.

National trials would continue to be monitored and the issue may be revisited with the appointed charge point operator in future, should circumstances change. However the priority remained of delivering a coherent, borough-wide EV charging strategy that benefitted all residents, not just those with off-street parking.

No supplementary question was asked as Matthew Broadley was not present.

Question C – Lauren Thompson of Rochester asked the Portfolio Holder of Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Mahil, the following:

“Given that Medway Council's Parking Services Annual Report states that parking policy should support local accessibility and consider the needs of local businesses, and given that the Council's parking account generated a surplus of £1.25 million in 2024/25, whilst off-street parking operations generated a surplus of £4.65 million, would the Council consider undertaking a time-limited pilot scheme offering the first hour of parking free in selected town centre car parks?

If the Council does not support such a pilot, in answering the question could it please provide:

- any evidence, assessments, consultations or previous trials that have examined the impact of free parking on town centre footfall and local business activity in Medway;
- any data currently held by the Council regarding the relationship between parking charges, visitor numbers, footfall and town centre economic activity;
- the financial modelling used to determine whether a one-hour free parking pilot would or would not be financially viable;
- the criteria that would need to be met for the Council to reconsider such a proposal in the future.”

Councillor Mahil took this question in the absence of Councillor Paterson, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement.

Councillor Mahil stated that the important role that parking played in supporting access to town centres and the success of local businesses was an important role, and the Council was committed to ensuring transport policies supported vibrant and accessible places.

Whilst the Parking Annual Report highlighted a financial surplus, it was important to note that any surplus from parking was reinvested in transport, public realm and environmental services that improved accessibility and supported local communities. This included maintaining roads, supporting public transport and improving access across Medway, in line with wider responsibilities.

In terms of evidence, a recent Medway-specific trial of free parking had not been undertaken. More broadly, national evidence suggested that parking charges were only one of a number of factors influencing footfall and economic activity, alongside the quality of the offer, events, public realm and wider regeneration. Any proposal such as a time-limited free parking scheme would therefore need to be carefully considered, including the potential impact on income used to support essential services, the risk of increased congestion, and the commitment to encouraging more sustainable travel choices. The Council's approach was guided by the priorities set out in the One Medway Council Plan, with the aim to support thriving town centres whilst also promoting sustainable, inclusive and financially resilient services. Alongside parking policy, the Council was supporting town centres through regeneration programmes, events, and initiatives that encouraged residents and visitors to spend time locally.

Whilst there were currently no plans to introduce a free parking pilot, the Council's approach would be kept under review and remain open to considering further evidence in future to ensure policies best supported the Council's communities and local economy.

Lauren Thompson asked the following supplementary question.

"I fully accept that parking is not the only factor affecting town centre footfall. The retail offer, online shopping, safety, public transport, business rates and wider region regeneration all matter. However, parking is one of the first practical decisions a resident makes before visiting a High Street. If a short, low-cost visit becomes inconvenient or disproportionately expensive, some residents will simply choose not to go at all. That matters because the Council's own strategies refer to accessible, viable town centres and support for local businesses. My question is therefore not whether free parking is a magic solution, it is whether Medway Council has properly tested whether a limited targeted first hour free pilot could remove one avoidable barrier to short visits while producing measurable evidence on footfall, dwell time, local spend and parking income. The pilot would allow the Council to make an evidence-based decision rather than relying on function either way, regeneration cannot rely only on physical improvements or residential development. People still need a practical, affordable reason to enter and use the town centre. Will the Council publish any evidence it holds, on parking charges footfall and business impact? And will it consider a measured pilot rather than simply assuming the current model is right?"

In response Councillor Mahil stated that he agreed with the analysis with regards to perception when it came to parking and how people chose and the behavioural change that could be affected using parking. He accepted that. However all the different factors needed to be taken into consideration, which is why it was under review and the Council was open.

Member Questions

Question D – Councillor Spalding asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple, the following:

"Medway was recently reminded of how valuable and essential it is to have a more than adequate Fire and Rescue Service.

The derelict building fire at Pier Road required six fire engines and a height vehicle. It took over 18 hours to extinguish.

Elsewhere recently in Medway, a garage on fire needed 3 fire engines, a kitchen alight saw 2 appliances attend and the rescue of the family pets. Outbuildings and trees in flames saw another 3 crewed attendance and not forgetting a certain derelict school was once again in the fire and rescue news. There was a road traffic accident in my own ward which also saw the Air Ambulance attend as part of the emergency response.

My ward, which is home to two COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazards) sites, other major industry, and an airfield, as well as high grade farmland, sits at the edge of Medway as part of the Peninsula. It is many many minutes away from wholtime fire stations in terms of response times. The Peninsula with only one route in and one route out relies upon its rural on call fire stations.

What action is Medway Council taking, and you as Leader of the Council, to not only ensure comprehensive fire and rescue coverage continues in Medway but that with all the proposed new homes and businesses proposed in the draft local plan, said protection is improved?"

The Leader advised that this question had been submitted prior to the recent Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (KMFR) held on 25 June 2026, which he knew Councillor Spalding had been present at.

He stated that this was an unusual occurrence, bearing in mind that the KMFR was effectively a separate local authority, and so as a unitary authority rare for Medway to deal with another local authority operating in its area. He further advised that he had received officer's urgent advice on this, which had led to a very helpful and powerful letter from the Chief Executive to the Chief Executive of Kent Fire and Rescue, which had been shared with ward colleagues and the chairs of parish Councils as it was important for residents and their representatives to know the work that officers were doing on this. He was aware that there was a meeting scheduled between officers and Kent Fire and Rescue officers, shortly.

At the meeting on 25 June 2026, Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) was to decide whether to launch a public consultation to get the views of local people on some important proposals and this was a pretty binary choice. Start the consultation, don't start the consultation. So he had been pleased to have been able to propose, supported by Members from many different political parties, a six week pause, that would allow trade unions to come forward with alternative options as well as elected Members from across the region, an opportunity to look at this in more detail.

However, he asserted that from Medway's' perspective, where 40% of the proposed cuts were being considered, particularly for Grain, for the reasons laid out in the question, around the COMAH sites, he thought that further consideration and further evidence was required to consider that.

Therefore there was now a six week period, probably looking at early August for an extraordinary meeting which had been mentioned at the end of the last meeting, and he would of course keep everybody informed as to what happens next.

Question E – Councillor Perfect had submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Maple:

"Can the Leader of the Council please update on any conversations he has had around certainty of a decision in relation to Local Government Reorganisation for Kent and Medway with any government minister or the front-running announced candidate for the Labour leadership The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, given Sir Keir Starmer's resignation as Leader of the Labour Party on 22 June 2026?"

In response, Councillor Maple advised that he was happy to say that very recently he and the Chief Executive had been invited to a seminar with Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, Alison McGovern, and civil servants. At that seminar, the ongoing timetable for Local Government Reform (LGR) had been confirmed. He added that the invite had been to all leaders and chief executives from all Councils in this phase, so there would have been 14 invites for leaders, 14 invites for chief executives across this region alone. At this stage, the working assumption remained that 16 July 2026 was when everyone was likely to hear. He had not seen Andy Burnham and so had not had the opportunity to ask him directly his views on this but was pleased to see a strong Labour victory in Macclesfield.

Question F – Councillor Tejan had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder of Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Mahil:

“Residents have reported inconsistent waiting times for the processing of parking permits. Could the Portfolio Holder please clarify the current Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the processing, issuing, and dispatching of parking permits? In responding, could he specify the expected turnaround time from payment to permit issuance; provide details of performance against this SLA over the past 12 months; indicate the number of cases that have exceeded the SLA and explain the reasons for such delays; outline what contingency arrangements are in place where delays may result in residents receiving Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) despite having paid for a permit; and set out the actions currently being taken to improve processing times and ensure that residents receive their permits promptly.”

Councillor Mahil took this question in the absence of Councillor Paterson, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement.

Councillor Mahil advised that the Council's published service standard was that residents should renew their parking permits at least 14 days before the expiry date, although they were able to renew online up to one month in advance. Once an application had been approved and payment had been received, the Council aimed to issue and dispatch the permit to the applicant's home address within 10 working days. Where an application was incomplete or further information was required, applicants were contacted and advised of what was required before the application could proceed. Once approved, applicants had up to 60 days to make payment.

With regards to performance over the past 12 months, (upon receipt of payment) all permits had been printed and posted within 10 working days apart from 2 days in July 2025 where this was exceeded by one day. Where delays occurred, they were generally the result of incomplete applications, delays in receiving supporting documentation or payment, or periods of particularly high demand. The service continued to monitor workloads to minimise these delays wherever possible. In circumstances where a resident had applied and paid for a permit but had not yet received it, officers would consider the individual circumstances. If a Penalty Charge Notice was issued solely because of an administrative delay by the Council, there were established representations and appeals processes through which the matter could be reviewed, and any appropriate action taken.

The Council was committed to improving the customer experience. Residents were encouraged to renew their permits in good time, and the service continued to review its processes to improve efficiency, manage peak demand and ensure applications were processed as quickly as possible. This included making full use of online applications, monitoring workloads, and maintaining clear communication with applicants throughout the process.

Overall, whilst most permits were processed within the published 10-working-day service standard, the importance of issuing permits promptly was recognised and performance would continue to be reviewed to ensure residents received the high standard of service they rightly expected.

Question G – Councillor Anang had submitted the following question to the Portfolio Holder of Business Management, Councillor Van Dyke:

“Could the Portfolio Holder explain the rationale behind the current charges to voluntary and non-profit organisations for the use of Council facilities, including community halls and green spaces, in giving her answer could she explain if any considerations have been made towards reduced rates, subsidies, or exemptions for groups delivering community-beneficial events, and what steps are being taken to ensure costs do not discourage such activities?”

Councillor Van Dyke advised that prices for the majority of bookable rooms or areas at Council owned facilities, including at community centres, and greenspace hire, were set by the Council in February each year as part of the budget-setting process. Medway Council was aware that the overwhelming majority of users were non-profit organisations, and when fees and charges were set annually, they aimed to reflect this. There were occasions when voluntary and non-profit organisations were charged a much lower rate than commercial organisers, and, on some occasions, such as the “park friends’ groups” (greenspaces) were exempt altogether.

The charges for hiring a public space to run an outdoor event were mainly there to cover the work the Council had to do, not just the use of the land itself. When any organisation, including a voluntary or non-profit group, applied to hold an event, the Council had to review the application, work with different departments, and make sure proper safety, risk, and management plans are in place. Because of this, a fee was charged to help cover those costs. However, community and voluntary groups were charged a much lower rate than commercial organisers, and “park friends’ groups” were exempt altogether. This reflected a deliberate effort to support community activity whilst ensuring the Council could manage events safely and responsibly.

The Brook Theatre and the Central Theatre operated a tiered pricing structure, which ensured that community groups automatically benefitted from reduced hire rates. For these groups, the venue hire fee was set at a level designed to cover the full operational and administrative costs associated with delivering events within the theatres. All fees and charges were approved by Cabinet prior to publication, in accordance with the Council’s governance processes.

The Corn Exchange operates with a clear commercial objective, whilst maintaining a strong commitment to accessibility for community and voluntary groups. Hire charges reflected not only the use of the space, but also the ongoing overheads required to run the venue, including staffing, utilities, maintenance, and the infrastructure needed to deliver events safely and professionally.

Every booking request, whether from a commercial, charitable, or community organisation, required Council input, including application review, coordination across departments, and checks to ensure appropriate safety, risk, and operational planning. Charges therefore contributed to both these administrative requirements and the venue's core running costs.

Discounted bookings were assessed on a case-by-case basis, recognising the differing scale, purpose, and community benefit of events. Any reductions were applied through a structured matrix, ensuring a fair, consistent, and transparent approach.

This balanced model enabled community and voluntary groups to access the Corn Exchange at reduced rates where appropriate, while ensuring the venue remained financially sustainable and responsibly managed.

The overwhelming majority of users of the sports centre facilities and greenspace hire were non-profit organisations and the fees and charges set annually reflected this.