

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 August 2026

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration. 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. Recommendations

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 & Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Climate Change;
- Community Centres;
- Emergency Planning;
- Flooding;
- Greenspaces;
- Local Plan and Planning Policy;
- Medway Norse;
- Public Rights of Way;
- Public transport;
- River Strategy;
- South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership;
- Strategic Regeneration;
- Street cleaning, recycling, waste collection, and waste disposal.

- 2.2 One Medway Council Plan and the Climate Change Action Plan are key documents underlying all of our activity. We also work closely with colleagues in the Place directorate to ensure our work underpins the principles of the Marmot Place ambitions for Medway and the Medway Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

3. Background

- 3.1 As the Portfolio Holder responsible for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration I would like to start by expressing my thanks to staff, partners and contractors from all sections of my wide portfolio for their continued dedication and commitment and for working collaboratively across the various services to deliver on so many subject areas.

- 3.2 The six key areas of my portfolio that I am devoting most of my time are:

- Front line services delivery;
- Local Plan;
- Climate Action;
- Public transport, including Active Travel and role of Chair of Transport for the South East (TfSE);
- Greenspace Development;
- River Strategy delivery.

Other areas take up varying amounts of time, depending on particular issues.

4. The Local Plan and Planning Services

The Local Plan

- 4.1 The Council has made big steps forward in preparing our new Local Plan. Following the publication of the Draft Plan at Regulation 19 in Summer 2025 for comments, the Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in December 2025. This is the first time that the Council has reached this critical stage of plan-making since January 2012.
- 4.2 The Plan sets out a framework for the sustainable development of Medway up to 2041, providing for the housing, employment and service needs for our residents and caring for our natural and historic environment. The Plan is now at Examination, and Hearing Sessions are arranged for September 2026.
- 4.3 With the proposed growth strategy set out in the Draft Plan, the Council is working to achieve our vision of sustainable development. This includes work on strategic transport. A new post has been set up in the Planning team and work is progressing on strategic highway and public transport planning to address future growth patterns in the submitted Local Plan. I engage regularly with planning policy staff, keeping track of key initiatives and

sharing strategic transport concerns. Work is also progressing on preparation of a strategy for Chatham town centre parking and other public transport improvements across Medway. Together with staff, I am also advocating for Medway and promoting cross-border and regional transport concerns and prospective schemes through my role as Chair for the Transport for South East (TfSE) Partnership Board.

- 4.4 The Council adopted an updated Developer Contribution Guide in June 2026 to help secure resources to mitigate the impacts of development.

Spatial Development Strategy

- 4.5 Part of the Planning and Infrastructure Act is the re-introduction of regional planning in the form of Spatial Development Strategies. It is anticipated that our area will be Kent and Medway and that regulations will shortly be introduced for the setting up of Strategic Planning Boards. We have received some initial funding and a recruitment process has commenced with formal work starting on the production of the SDS in the Autumn. This will require close co-operation and involvement of the districts and the first SDS will reflect existing Local Plans and the evidence which supported their production.

Digital

- 4.6 The Planning service has received further funding from MHCLG to continue to develop the digital planning service and remain one of the leading authorities within the country in this area, with key members of staff presenting at conferences all over the country.

Appeals

- 4.7 The Planning service has recently defended three appeals at Public Inquiry. The first of these to receive a decision from the Secretary of State was an outline application for the development of up to 800 dwellings on land off Lower Rochester Road, Wainscott. This appeal was dismissed.

The Inspector highlighted 3 key issues (i) the sustainability of the site (ii) the landscape and visual impact and (iii) the tilted balance.

(i) Sustainability

- He agreed with our barrister and consultant that at present the site is not sustainable.
- He gave far greater credibility to our Highway/sustainability witness (Chris Blamey) than theirs.
- He agreed with us that the sustainable transport solutions necessary for this site were the equivalent of that needed for a large urban extension rather than a site in the middle of the countryside.

- He accepted our view that Wainscott has limited facilities and that even the majority of new residents would not walk or cycle to them.
- He agreed with our points that the likelihood of anyone walking or cycling is not only impacted by distance but also by conditions such as hills, no segregated cycle way and general feelings of lack of safety.
- He agreed with us that new residents are unlikely to use buses and that there was no definitive commitment to Arriva.
- He consistently references Chris Blamey and the credibility he gives his evidence.

(ii) Landscape

- He accepts the point our consultant Phil Russell-Vick got their landscape consultant to agree that there would be significant harm.
- He recognises and accepts our point that it is not a valued landscape but agreed with our argument regarding weight to Area of Local Landscape Importance and Policy BNE34 argued by Phil.

(iii) Tilted Balance

- He gave the right weight to our lack of five-year housing land supply and our not meeting the housing delivery test – substantial.
- He agreed with us on the significant benefits of the scheme.
- He gave limited weight to the 2003 Local Plan.
- Importantly, he gave moderate weight (which is what we argued) to the emerging Local Plan and the spatial strategy because of the extensive process it had gone through, including considering and not including the appeal site.
- He agreed with us re the harms relating to the development and the weight that should be attached to them and agreed with us that the harm outweighed the benefits.

The second of the appeals relating to Gladman received a decision which allowed the appeal. This was consistent with the decision of the Planning Committee which followed the recommendation of officers and was guided by advice from our KC. While in that decision the Inspector did not give more than limited weight to the emerging Local Plan, he agreed with the conditions and S106 asks which will secure significant infrastructure linked to the development, including 30% affordable homes, all which are consistent with the Infrastructure Delivery Plan linked to the emerging Local Plan. As with all development on a green field site, all parties recognised that the development would result in harm, but the Inspector agreed with the Planning Committee that the weight attributed to housing need outweighed the harm resulting from development on this site.

Decisions have yet to be received in relation to Public Inquiry relating to The Wimpey development at Land West Hoo St Werburgh.

Flooding and Drainage

- 4.8 A business case for flood defence works at Nelson Terrace has been prepared and submitted and works are due to start in July, subject to receipt of funding. Additionally, early-stage work is underway to develop a business case for Cherry Tree Road, with both schemes intended for presentation to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) for consideration of core and levy funding.
- 4.9 The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and Highways teams are working in partnership with Southern Water to address surface water flooding issues at Bond Road. Southern Water has committed funding to this scheme and is currently in the process of developing a detailed drainage improvement design. It is anticipated that the proposed scheme will be available for review and public engagement within the next financial year.
- 4.10 Furthermore, the Council is collaborating with the Kent County Council (KCC) Flood & Drainage Team and the Medway & Swale Estuary Partnership to investigate the long-term impacts of coastal landfill degradation. This includes the preparation of a White Paper to secure funding for a comprehensive study into the environmental and flood risk implications at Temple Marsh and Riverside Country Park.

Development Management Performance

- 4.11 The Development Management team has determined 239 applications during Quarter 1 and continues to perform exceptionally well with 100% of major and minor applications determined within the target period, and over 97% of other applications determined within the target period (or within agreed timescales) against national targets of 60%, 70% and 70% respectively.
5. Street cleaning, recycling, waste collection, and waste disposal
- 5.1 During 2025/26, the Council collected and managed approximately 113,000 tonnes of household waste and recycling from across Medway. This included material collected through kerbside waste and recycling services, fly-tip clearances, Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), bring bank facilities and other waste management activities.
 - 5.2 Of this, approximately 41,000 tonnes were recycled, resulting in a recycling rate of 36.3%. While this represents a slight decrease from 37.2% in the previous year, it reflects a reduction in the amount of recycling presented by households rather than any reduction in the recycling services available to residents. Improving recycling performance remains a key priority for my portfolio, and work continues to encourage greater participation, reduce

contamination and support residents to make full use of the comprehensive range of recycling services available across Medway.

- 5.3 The Council, in partnership with Veolia, continues to minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill, supporting both local and national ambitions to tackle climate change and make better use of valuable resources. During 2025/26, just 3.2% of Medway's non-recyclable waste was sent to landfill. While this is slightly higher than the 1.6% recorded in the previous year, it remains a strong performance. 60.5% of Medway's waste was processed through Energy from Waste facilities, where waste is used to generate electricity rather than being buried in landfill. Maintaining such a low reliance on landfill helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with waste disposal and supports the Council's wider commitment to environmental sustainability and climate action. While Energy from Waste is preferable to landfill, the Council recognises that more can be done to remove valuable recyclable materials from the residual waste stream, ensuring that resources remain in circulation for as long as possible.
- 5.4 The Council's waste management contracts continued to perform strongly throughout 2025/26, delivering reliable, high-quality services for residents and meeting contractual performance standards. Effective contract management and strong partnership working have ensured that services remain resilient, efficient and responsive, while supporting the Council's environmental objectives and providing value for money. The Council's waste services are delivered through three key contractors:
- Medway Norse – responsible for household waste and recycling collections, street cleansing services, and the management and operation of Medway's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).
 - Veolia – responsible for the treatment and disposal of Medway's residual waste and the management of recycling materials, ensuring waste is handled safely, efficiently and in accordance with environmental regulations.
 - Countrystyle Recycling – responsible for the treatment and processing of food and garden waste, supporting the recovery of valuable resources by converting organic waste into compost and other beneficial products.
- 5.5 Fly-tipping continues to present a significant challenge for the Council and, during 2025/26, Medway Norse removed 6,827 fly-tips from across the borough. This represents a modest increase from 6,519 incidents in the previous year and reflects the ongoing pressures faced by local authorities in tackling illegal waste disposal. The prompt removal of fly-tipped waste remains essential in protecting the local environment, maintaining public confidence and preventing further incidents. Through effective partnership working, the Council has continued to respond quickly to reports and ensure that affected areas are returned to an acceptable standard as soon as possible.

- 5.6 Seasonal cleansing activities, including leaf clearance, weed removal and detritus clearance, played an important role in keeping footways accessible and well maintained throughout the year. Alongside these proactive works, more than 3,435 tonnes of street cleansing waste, including litter and road sweepings, were removed from Medway's streets during 2025/26. Whilst slightly lower than the previous year's 3,660 tonnes, this remains a significant volume and is broadly consistent with previous performance. It is important to note that variations in tonnage can be influenced by a range of factors, including seasonal weather patterns, levels of leaf fall, and the amount of debris deposited on the highway network. As such, a reduction in tonnage does not necessarily indicate a reduction in service performance.
- 5.7 A significant milestone was achieved during the year through the successful delivery of the Food Waste in Flats project. Launched on 6 April 2026, the new service extended weekly food waste recycling collections to more than 23,000 flats across Medway, creating approximately 5,000 additional collection points. This major service expansion means that every household in Medway now has access to a weekly food waste recycling service, supporting the Council's commitment to increasing recycling rates and reducing the amount of waste sent for disposal. The project also ensures Medway remains well placed to meet new Government recycling requirements. To support the rollout, a targeted communications campaign was delivered to raise awareness of the new service and encourage residents to participate, helping to maximise the environmental benefits of this significant investment.
- 5.8 The Council delivered a successful Christmas waste and recycling communications campaign to ensure residents were aware of festive collection arrangements, which moved to a three-weekly collection pattern for the second consecutive year. Using a range of channels including social media, digital advertising, local media and community venues, the campaign achieved a reach of more than 2.2 million, with the dedicated Christmas collections webpage receiving around 40,000 visits. The strong level of engagement helped residents access timely information and supported the smooth delivery of services during the busy festive period.
- 5.9 Looking ahead, Christmas 2026 will see an enhanced festive service, with food and garden waste collections continuing throughout the Christmas period in line with new national requirements for weekly food waste collections. This represents a change from previous years, when these services were paused over the festive period, and will provide residents with greater opportunities to recycle during one of the highest waste-producing periods of the year while helping to divert more material from disposal.
- 5.10 A new WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) recycling service was introduced this year, replacing library collection points with ten dedicated recycling banks across Medway and providing residents with convenient 24-hour access to facilities for recycling unwanted electrical items. This is particularly important as small electrical items, such as toasters, hairdryers, kettles and chargers, are among the most common

materials incorrectly disposed of in residual waste bins. The new recycling banks make it easier for residents to recycle these items responsibly, helping to recover valuable materials and reduce waste sent for disposal.

- 5.11 The garden waste subscription service for a second brown bin continued to perform strongly during its first year of operation, achieving 88% of its Year 1 target. The scheme has provided residents with greater capacity to recycle garden waste while helping to divert more organic material from the residual waste stream.
- 5.12 Throughout the year, the Waste Team delivered targeted recycling campaigns to support greater participation in paper, mixed recycling and food waste collections. Engaging residents in this way is essential to improving Medway's recycling performance, ensuring more recyclable materials are captured through the correct recycling streams and helping to reduce the environmental impact of waste disposal.
- 5.13 Medway's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) continued to provide an important service for residents, recording approximately 200,000 visits during the year. The sites maintained high standards of customer service and operational performance, achieving an overall customer satisfaction rating of 94%, representing a 1% increase compared with the previous year. This positive result reflects the ongoing commitment of site staff and demonstrates the value residents place on accessible, well-managed recycling and waste disposal facilities.

6. Public Transport & Active Travel

- 6.1 Over the past year, the Council has continued to make progress in delivering its priorities for public transport and active travel. Delivery has been supported through sustained external funding, ongoing programme activity and strengthened governance arrangements, with work progressing in line with the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Climate Change Action Plan.
- 6.2 Bus patronage has remained a key area of focus. The Council's programme of demand-led interventions has continued to deliver strong outcomes, most notably through the Free Bus Travel Weekends. The December 2025 events generated over 65,000 passenger journeys, while the May 2026 Bank Holiday weekend recorded a further 62,000 journeys—more than double that of a typical comparable weekend. These results are consistent with earlier campaigns delivered throughout 2025.
- 6.3 The May 2026 event also supported wider network management objectives, with approximately 3,700 passengers using Park & Ride services to access the Sweeps Festival. This demonstrates the role of integrated transport provision in supporting major events, improving access to town centres and reducing congestion. Collectively, these initiatives continue to contribute towards the Council's target of achieving 9 million passenger journeys per annum.

- 6.4 While overall bus patronage during 2025/26 reduced by 4.49% to 7.49 million passenger journeys, reflecting the impact of the national bus fare cap increasing from £2 to £3, concessionary travel continued to grow. Journeys made using ENCTS older persons' and disabled persons' passes increased by 4.06% to 2.138 million, demonstrating continued demand for bus travel amongst key user groups.
- 6.5 Alongside patronage growth, improvements to infrastructure and service reliability have progressed through BSIP and Local Bus Infrastructure Plan (LBIP) funding. Works at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station were initiated in Quarter 2 and largely completed by the end of the financial year, delivering a new one-way system, enhanced pedestrian facilities, resurfacing and increased operational capacity through additional layover space. These improvements are expected to support improved reliability and passenger experience. Further enhancements, including real-time passenger information, remain in development as part of the wider BSIP programme.
- 6.6 The Council has also secured a multi-year funding settlement across both bus and active travel programmes, providing greater certainty for medium-term delivery. This includes continued BSIP investment alongside consolidated Active Travel funding, supporting both infrastructure delivery and behaviour change activity. These funding streams are enabling progression of key priorities, including the development of LCWIP schemes and associated consultation activities.
- 6.7 In relation to active travel, governance arrangements have continued to strengthen through the cross-party Active Travel Group, which provides oversight of programme delivery and supports alignment with wider Council priorities. This has helped maintain a coordinated approach across transport, public health and climate workstreams.
- 6.8 Progress on LCWIP delivery has been consistent across the year. Initial concept development and commissioning of design work was undertaken earlier in the year, with schemes progressing through preliminary design and moving towards stakeholder engagement, Road Safety Audit and public consultation.
- 6.9 Behaviour change activity has continued to form a core element of delivery. The Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2026–2030 provides an overarching framework for this work, supported by a broad programme of engagement with schools and communities.
- 6.10 Delivery across the academic year indicates positive outcomes. School engagement has increased, with strong participation in programmes such as Living Streets WOW and Big Walk and Wheel, alongside national recognition for Medway schools. Campaign data indicates measurable increases in walking, wheeling and park-and-stride journeys, alongside reductions in car use.

- 6.11 This builds on a consistent programme of activity delivered throughout 2025, including International Walk to School Month, Walk to School schemes such as 'WOW' and targeted school engagement, which has contributed to increased participation and awareness of sustainable travel options.
- 6.12 The Council has also continued to expand participation in the Modeshift STARS programme, supporting schools to develop and maintain Travel Plans and embedding long-term behaviour change.
- 6.13 In addition, the Council has progressed its own Workplace Travel Plan for Gun Wharf through the Modeshift STARS Business platform. This has included staff engagement, data collection and the development of a targeted action plan and has been submitted for accreditation. The Travel Plan is aligned with the wider refurbishment of the site, which includes improved cycling facilities, upgraded changing provision and a review of parking arrangements.
- 6.14 A programme of supporting measures has also been delivered throughout the year. This includes road safety education, continued expansion of School Streets, promotion of walking initiatives and targeted accessibility improvements such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving and pedestrian crossings. These interventions, although often small in scale, contribute to improving safety and enabling more sustainable travel choices at a local level.
- 6.15 Overall, progress has been made across both public transport and active travel, with evidence of sustained bus patronage growth, continued infrastructure delivery and increasing engagement in behaviour change programmes. The combination of secured funding, structured programme management and strengthened governance arrangements provides a sound basis for continued delivery.
- 6.16 The focus for the coming period will be on maintaining delivery momentum, including progressing LCWIP schemes through consultation and implementation, improving passenger information systems through the delivery of our Real Time Information screens, and continuing to grow both bus patronage and active travel participation. Ongoing monitoring of performance and funding risks will also be required, particularly in relation to the delivery of supported bus services and wider financial pressures.

7. Emergency Planning

- 7.1 Recruitment to the post of permanent Senior Emergency Planning Officer still appears to be problematic and other Local Authorities are struggling to fill this Post (as a succession post).
- 7.2 The team assisted the Consultant for Public Health in developing the Cold Weather Plan for 1 November 2025 – 31 March 2026 also the Hot Weather (Heat Health Plan 01 June 26 – 31 Oct 26). These plans are refreshed each

season to reflect the arrangements set out in the National NHS & UK Health Security Agency National Emergency Plans.

- 7.3 The Emergency Planning team continues to monitor the Severe Weather Warnings and Alert Service, jointly run by the Meteorological Office and NHS/UK Health Security Agency, which advises Council services and voluntary organisations when trigger levels are met. To date (30 June 2026) response and action has been necessary on the following occasions:

Thunderstorms (TS) Storms/Wind	Cold	Rain	Heatwave
17 July 25 TS Amber 30 July 25 03 Oct 25 Storm Amy 22 Oct 25 Storm Benjamin 14 Nov 25 Storm Claudia 08 Dec 25 Storm Bram 08 Jan 26 Storm Goretti 26 Jan 26 Storm Chandra 04 Apr 26 Storm Dave	18 Nov 25 Yellow 28 Dec 25 Yellow 02 Jan 26 Amber	Please see storm and Surface water Flooding	08 July 25 10 July 25 11 Aug 25 Amber 20 May 26 Amber 18 Jun 26 Red

- 7.4 The Kent Resilience Forum has carried out a review which includes duties of the Kent Resilience Team. As a result, the training programme has fewer opportunities in which Council Officers can participate. However, the Emergency Planning Team has arranged for senior officers from across the Council to attend the following multi-agency training event:

- Multi Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) Course – 2026 (2 officers).
- Emergency Incident Loggist Train the Trainer (2 officers).
- Highway Emergency Workshop (2 officers).
- Oil Pollution Beach Master Course (2 officers).

- 7.5 The Emergency Planning team has provided additional internal training and represented Medway Council at the following exercises:

- MCG Control Centre Grain Siren & Rapid Reach – July 25.
- Ex Pegasus (Pandemic Flu).
- Ex Wagtail (Reservoir fail).
- Ex Bute 2 (EES Border issues).
- Ex Salvus.

- 7.6 The Emergency Planning team has continued to represent the Council on 20 separate standing Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) groups and task and finish groups, which are established as and when necessary, to undertake specific projects. These groups are consolidated by means of a KRF Delivery Groups Day which incorporates the three core function Groups, Plans & capabilities, Risk & Exercise & Training.

7.7 Throughout the year the Team has responded to 13 flood alerts ranging from:

- Surface Water – 10 events.
- Coastal – 3 events.

7.8 The Team has contributed to the following emergency Plans/Reports/Risks:

- Mass Fatalities Plan (continuous development).
- Vulnerable Persons Plan.
- Medway Ports Oil Pollution Plan.
- Risk – Building Collapse.
- External Emergency Plan for our COMAH Industries.
- Grenfell Lessons Identified.
- Winter Preparations Capability.
- Anti Vehicle Mitigation in our built-up areas.
- Assistance to the Flood officer in relation to a Public meeting at Cherry Tree Road regarding long term threat of surface water flooding.

7.9 Other Projects the Team has been involved with are:

- Department for Transport planned works to the SS Montgomery (anomaly investigation prior to removal of the visible mast structure).
- Council readiness for Counter Terrorism Threat Level changes and Incidents including passing information to relevant managers about the imminent Martyn's Law (this law may affect how we protect public buildings, spaces and all events).
- CCTV move to Gunwharf.

7.10 The Team contributed to the following operations and renewed the following contracts:

- Continuing advice about EOD matters to the Deangate Country Park project.
- Op Hawthorn.
- Op Leadfoot.
- Oil Pollution Tier 2 Contract.
- Grain Village Siren Maintenance Contract.
- Rapid Reach Emergency Message Contract.

7.11 Physical response to a wide range of issues such as coordinating Council actions/resources at the following Incidents:

- Avian Flu outbreaks x2.
- Water disruption x2.
- Water disruption - water main burst with formation of ice.
- Migrant related civil disturbance x2.
- Fires in retail environments x3 (one with accommodation above).

- Large scale smell of gas (whole Medway area – Damhead Creek Power Station).
- Bitumen Oil release into the Thames endangering our North and East coastline.
- Death of the Dutchess of Kent.
- Potential civil disorder due to Manchester Synagogue attack.
- Small Flu outbreak.
- Meningitis outbreak within the Student community.
- Evacuation assistance to Maidstone and the Miller Heights Building (Water ingress to electrical equipment).
- EES border disruption.
- Fire at Viridor Recycling site x2.
- Tree fell on a house, later found to be just in Maidstone's area of responsibility.
- Series of small, short term power cuts.

8. Greenspace Development

- 8.1 We have undertaken a number of changes to the delivery of Greenspaces, with the aim of improving both contract management and operational effectiveness. From April 2026, a number of Greenspace functions transferred to the Council from Medway Norse, including country parks, trees, allotments and urban rangers, in addition to reinstating client management oversight. This has been accompanied by a new contract with Medway Norse setting out key areas of responsibility for the joint venture, overseen by a new Liaison Board which I chair. I am confident this new structure will enable us to provide a better service for our residents and visitors.
- 8.2 The Medway and Swale Estuary Partnership, hosted by Medway Council has been involved in a number of projects over the past year, including as part of the Whose Hoo project. These have included:
- **Wild Estuary** - a six-week programme of educational activities aimed at 7-11 year olds, based on the Forest School approach of child centred learning in a natural environment, delivered at schools across the peninsula.
 - **Cleaner Coast** - regular monthly beach cleans (including litter surveys) across the key coastal locations.
 - **Mind the Gap** - Hedgerow surveys, restoration and new hedgerows at agreed locations in partnership with local farmers/landowners.

- 8.3 The partnership also continued to co-host (with the South East Rivers Trust) the North Kent Catchment Improvement Group (CIG) and develop projects in accordance with the Group's action plan.
- 8.4 Over the coming year, we will continue to co-host the North Kent CIG group and develop/deliver projects. Alongside this, we have two key projects in Medway currently:
- **Medway Dark Skies (in partnership with CPRE Kent)** - raising awareness around the impacts of light pollution, particularly for nocturnal wildlife and carry out citizen science activities/surveys with volunteers.
 - **Thames Catchment Community Eels Project** - undertaking eel e-DNA surveys to identify the presence of eels across the north Kent marshes and to carry out necessary work to improve eel passage and habitat connectivity.

Government funding for play area improvements in Chatham

- 8.5 Medway has just been awarded £270k funding from the Government to improve three play areas in Chatham over the next two years. The Government selected the Chatham area focusing on deprivation affecting children, the number of children per playground, playground size and children's distance to travel to playgrounds. The three play areas to be improved are Brompton Garden Street, Balfour Recreation Ground and Barnfield Recreation Ground and we look forward to sharing more details with local residents and park visitors on this exciting project shortly.

Play area upgrades undertaken in the past year (since August 2025)

- 8.6 Work was carried out in Spring 2025 to improve five play facilities across Medway. These upgrades aim to provide better play opportunities for children and young people and have been funded through developer contributions from the local area (£106). At Hillyfields Community Park in Gillingham, the old goalpost has been removed and replaced with a new multi-sport goal. Cherry Trees Open Space in Rainham has benefited from balancing beams, somersault bars, see-saw, and play panels. Victoria Gardens had a big refurbishment including a wider variety of swings, an infant multi-play unit, see-saw, stepping pods, spinning bowl, springers, somersault bars, balancing bars, and bespoke play panels. The overall design reflects the historic character of the local area. Hook Meadow and Gillingham Park both had additional play equipment installed and improvements to promote inclusivity and help children with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Cozenton Park nursery opening

- 8.7 In April we celebrated the opening of Medway's first community tree nursery in Cozenton Park. The site was the former plant nursery and, with the support of Hadlow College, grew the bedding plants for Medway. Sadly,

when the nursery closed a decade ago, the site did deteriorate but it has been given a new lease of life thanks to funding and community support behind it. Local volunteer group, Friends of Cozenton Park Community Tree Nursery, are growing and nurturing trees on site to be planted out in Medway.

- 8.8 The Deputy Mayor of Medway officially opened the community tree nursery and planted a fruit tree in the community garden. More than 300 people attended the open day and were given a guided tour of the tree nursery by volunteers, took part in willow weaving, treebola, lavender cuttings and could feedback ideas for the new community garden.
- 8.9 The project has been funded by S106 contributions from the local area and the Forestry Commission (Tree Production Capital Grant) which kick started the project to clear the old nursery site and funded items such as the containers and rain water harvesting system. The volunteer group was awarded a start-up grant from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which has funded much needed tools and equipment.
- 8.10 The next stage of the old nursery site will be the new community garden and new allotment plots later this year. Wider improvements to Cozenton Park will follow in the future including refurbishing the play area and enhancements to the skatepark.

Green Flag Awards

- 8.11 Medway has eight Green Flag Award-winning parks, along with a Green Heritage Award. These parks are Broomhill Park, Gillingham Park, Great Lines Heritage Park, Hillyfields Community Park, The Vines, Capstone Farm Country Park, Riverside Country Park and Ranscombe Farm Reserve (managed by PlantLife). The awards are organised by Keep Britain Tidy, and full judging takes place on a multi-year cycle basis, and this year it was the turn of Broomhill, Great Lines and Ranscombe Farm, with all passing.

9. Rights of Way and Access

Completion of Key Improvement Projects

- 9.1 Design work has been completed on RS328 and delivery is being co-ordinated with the developers on site.
- 9.2 Access improvements to Grain Coastal Park, including disable parking spaces, removing of steps and installation of a handrail. Work continues on developing a fit for purpose step free access to the sea wall and KCIII ECP.
- 9.3 RS103 has undergone surface improvements to enhance accessibility.

PROW Budget Uplift and Staffing expansion

- 9.4 The budget uplift has enabled the PROW service to react to obstructions and enquires in a timely manner. The PROW office post is not yet filled due to internal restructures.

Support for new LTP Scheme

- 9.5 RS120 Frindsbury: improvements to the existing hard surface, widening and potential to provide lighting. This path provides access to primary and SEN schools and allotments.
- 9.6 RRX14 Rochester: Improvements to the hardstanding and interventions to reduce the slip hazards.
- 9.7 RRX16 Rochester: Accessibility improvements to surface.
- 9.8 RRX10 Rochester: Surface improvements, enhancing accessibility to open spaces.

Whose Hoo Programme and Rural Investment Initiatives

- 9.9 The Whose Hoo programme has commenced. Base line surveys relating to usage have been carried out at all six locations. Ecological surveys are being carried out in July 2026. A programme of capital works is progressing and being informed by the survey results.
- 9.10 The Rural Investment initiatives are due to complete in September 2026, with existing routes being improved and new paths delivered within the Deangate Community Park.

10. Bird Wise

UNESCO East Coast Flyway World Heritage Site Bid

- 10.1 Work continues on the UNESCO East Coast Flyway World Heritage Site bid, one of eight sites on the UK Tentative List. Led by the RSPB, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and National Trust. The bid covers the Thames to Humber estuaries, including the Medway Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar sites. Medway Council remains engaged in the stakeholder group as evidence gathering and mapping work progresses towards a final submission. If successful, World Heritage Site status could be awarded in 2030.

Flight Paths Future Project

- 10.2 Bird Wise has secured Medway Heritage Place funding for the Flight Paths Future project at The Strand, Gillingham. The project highlights the importance of the East Coast Flyway for migratory birds and aims to engage

young people through school activities, educational resources, interactive sessions and new interpretation signage.

Riverside Country Park Dog Exercise Area

- 10.3 A secure off-lead dog exercise area funded by Bird Wise has been completed at Riverside Country Park and is proving popular. The project also included native hedgerow planting to enhance biodiversity and provide screening, delivered in partnership with the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership and country park volunteers.

11. Climate Change

- 11.1 The first year of the Climate Change Action Plan 2025-28 has been completed and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee before going to Cabinet. Of the 42 targets within the plan, 35 have been progressed to date.
- 11.2 Community Climate Working Group – The volunteer Group met four times during the year and participated in a PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) workshop to develop a shared vision and identify actions to support its future direction. Feedback from the workshop was positive and has informed both the focus of future meetings and the Group's ongoing priorities. Members received updates from the Greenspaces, Access and Birdwise teams on climate-related initiatives, and from the Council's Housing Revenue Account Team on the retrofit of Council housing stock to improve energy efficiency and help tackle fuel poverty. The Group also received a presentation on Medway's Marmot Place ambition and took part in an asset-mapping exercise to identify programmes and initiatives that contribute to reducing health inequalities in line with the Marmot principles. Plans are underway to deliver a screening of the National Emergency Briefing film in partnership with the Group, and members have also been invited to help shape and contribute to a community-focused climate event later in the year. Throughout the year, the Group provided feedback on the River Strategy and continued to share and promote climate-related funding opportunities, projects and activities, helping to strengthen community-led climate action across Medway.
- 11.3 Medway Community Energy Project Working Group – A dedicated working group (led by volunteers from the main CCWG) was established at the end of 2025 following an open call for volunteers, which attracted around 20 local residents and community representatives. The Group brings together individuals with expertise in renewable energy, net zero and community action, alongside residents who are passionate about contributing to Medway's climate ambitions and social justice. The Group is currently exploring the establishment of a Community Interest Company (CIC) and exploring potential community energy projects, including solar energy generation, community knowledge-sharing and anaerobic digestion opportunities. Along with Council officers, I am supporting the Group by connecting its work with relevant Council programmes and opportunities and

facilitating links with key stakeholders and potential delivery partners to help progress community-led energy initiatives across Medway.

- 11.4 Member Climate Change Working Party – The Working Party met three times during the year and continued to develop their Climate Action Ward Improvement Plans (CAWIPs), while promoting climate-related funding opportunities and initiatives within local communities. The first Climate Action Parish Improvement Plan (2025/26) was developed by High Halstow Parish Council, setting out a programme of community-based climate action activities, including repair cafés, Carbon Literacy training, planting initiatives and swap shops. The programme culminated in a community tree-planting event in February 2026, where more than 30 volunteers planted almost 250 native trees. Working Party members also received updates on the Medway Community Energy Project, Heat Network studies, and participated in a workshop to support the ongoing development of CAWIPs.
- 11.5 Heat Networks – In September 2025, a funding application was made to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's (DESNZ) Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU) for Round 15 of Heat Network Feasibility Funding. In December 2025, it was confirmed that Medway was successful in securing the funding for the Detail Project Design (DPD) study of the Hoo Heat Network. This follows on from Techno-Economic Feasibility study that has been completed and will demonstrate technical viability, assess risks and present delivery options for the Heat Network. It is expected the DPD study will be completed by Summer 2027.

12. Strategic Regeneration

- 12.1 Work on the Council's refreshed Place Strategy Medway 2041 is underway. An extensive research activity including emerging and existing strategies, priorities and programmes across the organisation began in November 2025, with support from consultants BTPW. The new strategy is evidence based and data led and closely aligns with completed and emerging strategic work across the organisation, including the emerging Local Plan, and within the context of Local Government Organisation.
- 12.2 An officer survey was created for service managers to update their key priorities and ambitions. Following DMT and CMT feedback, comprehensive drafts of the external and internal documents have been created. This will include a short, easily accessible summary document. Online briefing sessions for service managers were held across July talking through the document structure content and the next steps of engagement. A series of in-person officer workshops will be held where service representatives will be able to provide detailed focused input, to ensure the Place vision accurately reflects each service's ambition for Medway. This will be followed by stakeholder engagement. Completed documents setting out the vision for Medway as a Place, are on programme for Cabinet approval and publication this year.

13. River Medway Strategy

- 13.1 In February 2026, Cabinet approved the River Medway Strategy, along with resource to aid delivery up to March 2028. This was Medway's first strategy with an overarching aim of improving the river's offer in 28 years of Medway as a unitary authority. The strategy is due to go back to Cabinet in October 2026 with some minor amends following further consultation with external stakeholders. Recruitment of a River Strategy Delivery Officer is now complete, as well as setup of the River Strategy Delivery Partnership Board (RSDP), with planning underway for four subgroups that will focus on the key areas identified in the strategy - Sporting & Leisure, Natural Environments & Habitats, Tourism, Arts, Culture & Events and Business & Economy.
- 13.2 The inaugural RSDP Board took place on 27 July, where key stakeholders discussed next steps, project ideas for each of the four subgroups and potential funding streams. The Council's target is to have one project for each group in progress or delivered by Autumn 2027 that improves Medway's river offer.

14. South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

- 14.1 I assumed the Chairmanship of the STG Joint Committee, which provides governance oversight of the Building Control Partnership shared between Canterbury, Gravesham and Swale Councils. In this role, I have led the monitoring of service performance, ensuring effective delivery against agreed objectives, while proactively addressing emerging challenges within an increasingly complex building regulations environment.
- 14.2 Building Control is a statutory service that plays a critical role in maintaining public safety and compliance with building regulations. The service is reliant on Registered Building Inspectors (RBIs), and there is currently a significant national shortage of qualified professionals. The introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022 has further tightened competency requirements, reducing the number of individuals able to undertake regulated functions. Consequently, both local authorities and private sector organisations are competing for a limited pool of skilled professionals, with private employers often able to offer substantially higher salaries and performance-related incentives. This continues to present a significant recruitment and retention challenge for local authority building control services.
- 14.3 Working with fellow Members of the Joint Committee, I have taken an active role in addressing these workforce challenges and the associated risks to service delivery. As an interim measure, skill shortage payments were introduced to help retain existing RBIs whilst a longer-term solution was developed. Following a comprehensive review, the Joint Committee approved a new STG pay model that directly links remuneration to RBI registration and competency levels, rather than traditional organisational grading structures. Under the new framework, career progression and salary advancement are based on professional competence, licensing status and

achievement of recognised regulatory classifications, helping to strengthen recruitment, retention and service resilience.

- 14.4 The Building Control team continues to perform exceptionally well for the year, plan assessing (within 15 working days) 90.11% and validating applications (within 3 working days) 99.08% against the national targets of 75% and 90% respectively, as well as issuing 12,206 inspection reports as required under Building Safety Regulators Operational Standard Rules KPI 1.12. For Medway dealing with 67 new, 136 ongoing dangerous structures, 86 new and 364 ongoing unauthorised works. The Partnership also maintains a 24/7 out-of-hours emergency response capability to ensure public safety and regulatory resilience, providing timely intervention at dangerous structure incidents occurring outside normal working hours.
- 14.5 The Partnership's online submission portal continues to deliver significant efficiencies, enabling applications to be submitted 24 hours a day and uploaded directly into their back-office system for processing. 48% of all fee earning applications received by the Partnership were submitted via the portal, with a further 6% received through the Planning Portal. The remaining applications received by email (45%), with only 1% submitted in hard copy.
- 14.6 Fire safety is a critical concern. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a legal duty on "responsible persons" to ensure fire safety. To fulfil these duties, competent fire risk assessors are essential. STG consultancy continues to deliver fire risk assessments for Medway Council's housing services. Housing has three multi-occupied residential buildings with storeys over 11 metres in height where assessors also carry out quarterly checks on all fire doors in common parts and endeavour to undertake annual checks on all fire doors of individual domestic premises as part of the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022.

15. Support for key service areas

- 15.1 Medway Council has a core statutory duty to collect waste and recycling from domestic properties, maintain litter-free streets, and provide accessible household recycling centres to residents of Medway. As one of the few universal services delivered to all Medway residents, it plays a vital role in enhancing the local environment and quality of life.
- 15.2 As well as continuing to keep pace with development within the waste industry, we are also focused on the delivery of the waste strategy and the upcoming LGR process and how our neighbouring authorities deal with waste management. I have instructed officers to keep me informed of any developments within the waste industry. I will continue to champion these at Cabinet and Council level to support our climate agenda in all aspects on my responsibilities.
- 15.3 The new contract for waste, SEN transport and elements of greenspace management with Medway Norse has been finalised. Other aspects of

Greenspaces services have now moved back in house, including Country Parks, Allotments and Tree management.

- 15.4 I have worked to support the development and delivery of Medway's sustainable transport agenda. This has included engaging with officers, consultants, and operators to help ensure the delivery of a more reliable, accessible, and affordable bus network. I've contributed to forums such as the Active Travel Group and quarterly meetings with our local bus operators, helping to ensure that transport planning and service delivery remains responsive to local needs.

16. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 16.1 I continue to chair a fortnightly meeting with key Planning and related portfolio Members, with the Assistant Director, Culture & Community, Chief Planning Officer and other service officers to monitor and progress the new Local Plan and wider Planning matters. This meeting is used to direct work on the new Plan. I have set up and chaired a cross-party working group on the Local Plan.

- 16.2 I have now taken up my new role as the Chair of Transport for the South East (TfSE).

17. Championing the Interests of service users / Medway residents / Children and Young People

- 17.1 I have consistently supported initiatives that aim to benefit families, young people, and wider communities. Once again, and this time with Government support, we are able to provide free summer holiday bus travel for children and I recently attended the Medway Youth Council, where transport for young people and climate issues were the most important issues raised.

18. Scrutiny of LATCOs - Medway Norse Ltd

- 18.1 Governance arrangements are established for LATCOs to be scrutinised at Cabinet Sub-Committees and part of my role as Portfolio Holder includes chairing the Cabinet Sub-Committee for Medway Norse Ltd. Meetings have allowed Members to establish the Governance arrangements, consider the draft Business Plan for Medway Norse and review the Risk Register. Performance against key performance indicators and financial performance is also monitored at meetings.
- 18.2 The new governance arrangements for Medway Norse continue with the contract approval and approval of the Business Plan. I also continue to chair the Medway Norse/Medway Council Liaison Board.
- 18.3 I am also on the Sub-Committees for both MDC and Kyndi, helping to support their work in delivering key developments and services for Medway.

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Appendices

None

Background Documents

None