

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

Thursday, 18 June 2026

6.30pm to 7.39pm

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, Browne, Clarke, Field, Finch, Hackwell BEM, Jones, McDonald and Mark Prenter

Substitute: Councillor: Sands (Substitute for Pearce)

In Attendance: Paul Boyd, Chief Information Officer
Steve Dickens, Democratic Services Officer
Bob Dimond, Chief Leisure and Environment Officer
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services
Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer

93 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Pearce.

94 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 26 March 2026 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as correct.

95 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

96 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.

97 Climate Change Action Plan 2025-2028: Year 1 (January - December 2025) Update

Discussion:

The Chief Leisure and Environment Officer introduced the report. He highlighted the progress made by the Council in the first year of the action plan with 35 of 42 actions were underway. Many of the actions had a number of phases so would not be completed until the end of the four year cycle, however positive progress had been made.

Seven actions had not been started, this was primarily due to capacity within the relevant service, for example work with the property team has been delayed by the Gun Wharf Improvement Project. Many of the actions were managed by the relevant service, I further information was required by the Committee regarding those actions it would be provided in writing following the meeting.

There were a number of areas of development which were not currently in the action plan, for example the Warm Homes grant of £1.3m to improve housing for families with a combined income of less than £36,000. An updated action plan to take account of those developments would be proposed to Cabinet in due course.

The following issues were discussed:

Service based actions – in response to a request that Members receive contact information for the relevant services, the Chief Leisure and Environment Officer agreed to provide the information to the Committee.

Financing – it was asked what monies were provided by external grants and what was funded by the Council and what would the effect be if funding was withdrawn. The Chief Leisure and Environmental Officer stated that applications for grants and the management of the budgets were the responsibility of the relevant service manager, and they were aware of the four year action plan and the importance of funding for that period when managing those actions.

The Chief Operating Officer added that there was a great deal of activity taking place within a range of services, which was covered by existing resources and it would be necessary to estimate how much of that resource was delivering the Climate Change Action Plan. It was agreed that the Chief Leisure and Environment Officer would collate an analysis of the activity and estimated costs as a briefing note for the committee.

Burnham Wood – A Member noted that 1,300 trees had been planted in Burnham Wood, he asked if there was a management plan to ensure the trees

become properly established as he was concerned that their growth had been hampered. The Chief Leisure and Environment Officer stated that there was a 3-year management plan to support the establishment of the trees in the area. He undertook to provide further detail about the specific scheme following the meeting.

Tree coverage – it was asked how the Council measured the tree coverage in the area. The Chief Leisure and Environment Officer stated that the service worked closely with the tree officers in the planning department and Medway Norse tree officers now reported to him to provide a streamlined approach. A tree survey was scheduled to take place to provide a baseline, however, the timing of this was dependent upon resources within the Planning Department.

Wild flowers – A Member commented that in their ward were rare species of orchid and asked what could be done to ensure they thrived, the Chief Leisure and Environment Officer undertook to review the situation and provide an update to the Member.

Emissions – the Committee discussed emissions. It was asked if the Council had measurements on its emissions, emissions in the area and use of resources including the effect of the Council's investment in AI. The Chief Leisure and Environmental Officer stated that some of the information was difficult to source but would endeavour to provide updates where possible. Further information was also requested regarding how much emissions had been reduced by through the various schemes the Council had undertaken and the cost of those schemes. The Chief Leisure and Environmental Officer undertook to provide further information regarding emissions following the meeting.

Partnership Working – in response to a Member question regarding partnership working within the Council to ensure services worked together effectively, the Chief Leisure and Environmental Officer explained that there was an Officer Oversight and Implementation Board, which had senior management representation and took responsibility for effective co-working between departments. Meetings were held six weekly and every second meeting all service managers attended to report on progress in their area. Thus, the Board was able to ensure that the different services worked together in tandem.

Procurement – a Member asked if there were sustainability targets in relation to procurement and suppliers with a strong environmental record were prioritised. The Chief Leisure and Environmental Officer stated that the issues would be for the procurement service.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Year One progress update against the Climate Change Action Plan and recommends it is progressed through the appropriate governance processes for reporting Year One progress to Cabinet.

- b) The Committee requested a briefing paper providing an analysis of the activity and budget via the relevant services including the impact on the council's climate change goals.
- c) The Committee requested a briefing paper outlining sustainability in procurement services in line with the Council's climate change goals and prioritising sustainable suppliers.

98 Annual Review of the Council's Petitions Scheme

Discussion:

The Head of Democratic Services introduced the report. He highlighted that there had been an increase in the number of petitions and the number of signatures of those petitions in 2025-26, with twenty-one petitions received in total, all of which related to areas under the remit of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The following issues were discussed:

Members welcomed the increase in petitions, and the positive outcomes from petitions. One Member commented that he was pleased that the Council was, in response to a petition moving forward with consideration of a 20mph zone in Strood to improve road safety.

Outcomes – in response to a question whether petitions were a way to influence Council decisions the Head of Democratic Services highlighted petitions where petitions had achieved an outcome, as detailed in the report and also noted that the Council were not always able to meet the aims of petitions.

Decision:

The Committee noted the annual review of the Council's Petitions Scheme.

99 The One Medway Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarter 4 2025/26

Discussion:

The Chief Information Officer introduced the report. He highlighted that two of the four performance measures had exceeded performance targets during the year, these were the reduction of phone calls to the Council and the accessibility rating of the Council website.

There had been three change to the Strategic Risk Summary in the quarter. Risk SR03B 'Insufficient budget funding' had been reduced from A2 to B2 which reflected the three year financial settlement from central government. Risk SR54 'Recruitment and Retention' had increased from C3 to B2. This

reflected the difficult recruitment and retention environment. Risk SR58 'Gun Wharf building closure' had been de-escalated from the Strategic Risk Register as the RAAC issue has been dealt with and the Gun Wharf project was now at the renovation stage.

The following issues were discussed:

AI Search Agent - in response to a question whether the Council had data available on the use of the AI search tool, the Chief Information Officer stated that the Council received weekly reports highlighting various data including what was searched and the responses provided. The launch of the AI search agent was undertaken with enhanced support, so changes to the web in real time to respond to identified issues. After the first few days, real time updates were no longer required and searches were over 90% successful. He added that this data would be included in future reports to the Committee.

Website – A Member requested further information regarding the presentation of the website, the Chief Information Officer stated that the focus was to increase the accessibility of the website for visually impaired users, the Council's website had risen from 73% accessible to 90%. He acknowledged that more work was required in some areas of the website. There were two parts to the website, one area was designed on a similar basis to Gov.uk and focused on factual information and making payments. The other part of the website such as theatres and leisure needed to have a more commercial outlook.

Recruitment and retention – in response to a question why the risk related to recruitment and retention had increased. The Chief Information Officer stated that it was believed that Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) was the primary cause alongside competition from London for staff.

LGR - it was asked if LGR not going ahead was also a risk. The Chief Operating Officer stated that LGR was included in the Risk Summary, but if LGR did not go ahead it would not necessarily result in abortive work for the Council as much of the Council's preparations for LGR were focused on areas which would require development should LGR and improvement anyway irrespective of LGR.

Cyber Security – further information was requested regarding the risk related to Cyber Security. The Chief Information Officer stated that Cyber Security was considered a managed risk because there was always a potential risk, however the Council worked to reduce the risk on an ongoing basis.

Budget Savings – in response to a question what were the savings associated with the investment in AI and other Medway 2.0 projects. The Chief Information Officer stated that direct savings had led to underspend in the relevant departments, for example. CABS had been able to hold vacancies, because they have used AI. Another service where invested in AI had realised savings was Invoice processing. There were now automated checks to ensure invoices met the Council's criteria for payment and automated emails. As a result there

was a saving of £468,000, staff were redirected to other areas and one post was removed.

Decision:

- a) The Committee considered the Q4 2025/26 progress of the performance indicators used to monitor progress of the Council's priorities, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

100 Capital and Revenue Outturn and Annual Debt Write Off Report 2024/26

Discussion:

The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Annual budget report, he highlighted the final budget position which represented a £9.8m overspend which was funded by an increased capitalization direction which now stood at just over £28m for the financial year.

The Committee were asked to note the Council's general fund reserves position which stood at just over £10m and the declassification of £3.7m of reserves to the revenue budget.

The following issues were discussed:

Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) – A Member asked if the final budget position, low level of reserves meant further EFS may be required for the 2026/27. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the final overspend in Adult Social Care was significantly higher than had been forecast in round 3 monitoring. As a consequence, he was less confident that the 2026/27 budget would be met without further recourse to EFS. He had informed CMT and the administration that he was concerned that the overspend in Adult Social Care would place strain on the 2026/27 budget. The Council had put resources into adult social care, but forecasting had been overly optimistic regarding the delivery of savings targets and work was ongoing to understand the causes of this.

Debt write off – A Member commented that £2.4m represented a significant amount of unpaid Council Tax debt to write off. The Chief Operating Officer stated that finance typically achieved 97% collection of council tax in year and a 99% collection rate over the longer period, however, more recently the cost of living crises had impacted collection rate. Whilst the Council had put additional resources into collection of debt, it was realistically not expected to recover the £2.4m, hence the exceptional level of write off.

Finance and Interest – A Member asked if the Chief Operating Officer retained confidence in the Council's treasury advisors following the finance and interest overspend against the budget last year. The Chief Operating Officer explained

that it had been expected that interest rates would fall during the last two to three years, however, this has not happened and due to the conflict in the middle east, The Public Works Loans Board rates (PWLB) had risen to circa 5.5%. This had largely caused the overspend shown in the budget outturn. The Chief Operating Officer added that the Council had recently changed its treasury advisors.

Overspend across departments – A Member commented that whilst there were one or two areas of significant overspend. There was also overspend across a number of budgets. The Chief Operating Officer acknowledged that there were some departments where budgets had seen an overspend, however, the wider department was within budget, or there were particular causes for the overspend. One example was the Public Health budget, which had overspends in some areas but as a whole was within budget overall.

Capital Programme – A Member asked if there had been a change to the Capital Programme due to the overspend. The Chief Operating Officer stated that the Capital Programme had not changed, a number of projects were already significantly underway. However, he acknowledged that the Capital Programme had required increased borrowing which had to be repaid and this had impacted the revenue budget.

Decision:

- a) The committee noted the 2025/26 revenue and capital outturn position as summarised in Section 4 of the report, and the Council's reserves position as summarised in Section 13 of the report.
- b) The committee noted the declassification of £919,000 of earmarked reserves and transfer of these to general reserves, carried out under Director's delegations.
- c) The committee noted that Council has been asked to agree the addition of £3.743million to the revenue budget from general reserves to fund the final overspend as set out in Section 13 of this report. This includes the £2.825million agreed by the Council in February and preserves the Council's general reserve balance at £10.012million, just above the minimum level set by the Section 151 Officer.
- d) The committee noted that Council has been asked to agree to the following removals from the Capital Programme for scheme that have underspent as set out in Section 11 of this report:
 - £160,000 for Greenacre Academy
 - £133,000 for Hundred of Hoo 6th Form
 - £63,000 for Leigh Academy Canopy
 - £20,000 for Strood Academy
 - £226,000 for Victory Academy
 - £65,000 for Dane Court
 - £2,000 for Luton Primary (Nursery)
 - £3,000 for ICT Infrastructure

- £168,000 for Waste Fleet Replacement

- e) The committee noted that Council has been asked to agree to the following removals from the Capital Programme for schemes that could be funded by revenue Section 106 developer contributions:
- £400 for Rainham Play
 - £400 for Jackson Fields & Victoria Gardens
 - £10,000 Luton Millennium Green
- f) The committee noted the debts written off against provisions as set out in section 14 of the report.

101 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which set out proposed changes to the Work Programme.

Decision:

- a) The Committee agreed the 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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