

Public Questions

Question A – Milo O'Connor, of Rochester, asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, the following:

“Would you be able to inform me if Medway Council has protocols in their contracts with private funeral directors that would enable Medway Council’s environmental health officers to:

- Routinely enter and inspect local funeral home backrooms and mortuaries.
- Issue local compliance orders on behalf of the national regulator.
- Shut down premises that fail to meet statutory hygiene or care standards.

This question is in light of the crimes of Robert Bush in Hull Yorkshire, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison, where around 20 bodies and 100 ashes left to rot in a Hull mortuary.

The Government itself is pushing for a review of the funeral industry led by the Department of health.

This is a pressing issue, Medway Council reviewing their contracts with private funeral directors would be a good first step to facilitate crucial regulatory changes needed in the funeral sector.”

In response, Councillor Paterson said that the Council had strong, positive and valued relationships with many Medway funeral directors, including Andrea Button and John Weir. He advised that the Food and Safety Team of Public Protection was the enforcing authority for all funeral directors in Medway under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Medway Council was responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Act, and all subordinate health and safety legislation.

He stated that at the request of HM Government, all funeral directors in Medway had been visited in 2024 and findings fed back to the Ministry of Justice. No formal enforcement action was taken against any of them at the time and standards were generally very high. Should any health and safety issues be identified in the future, the Council would deal with them in accordance with its Health and Safety Enforcement Policy. This could include the use of improvement notices or, in cases where there was extreme risk, prohibition notices.

However, local authorities were required to be able to explain to a business why they were being inspected. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the national health and safety regulator, had identified a list of national priorities and a list of sectors/activities currently suitable for proactive inspection. This was last updated in April 2026, and funeral directors were not mentioned. Accordingly, funeral directors were not currently subject to proactive health and safety inspections in Medway.

Councillor Paterson advised that the Council would investigate any complaints or concerns raised about funeral directors, or if it became aware of any local

intelligence from local partners. The Government was currently reviewing the enforcement regime for funeral directors and the Council would follow any advice/instructions that followed.

Milo O'Connor asked the following supplementary question:

"You mentioned that in 2024 funeral homes were checked and nothing was wrong. When will next set of checks happen?"

In response, Councillor Paterson said that his understanding was that the checks in 2024 had taken place at the request of the Ministry of Justice, linked to the case mentioned in the question. Those were specific, non-repeating inspections. The general inspection regime continued under health and safety legislation. If an issue was identified or if the inspections were made routine, the Council would comply with that legislation, but currently, that was not the basis on which those inspections took place.

Member's Questions

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

"I was grateful to address the recent meeting of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority and highlight how the Grain on call firefighters got to an incident locally and were 'getting water on,' before any help from full time stations arrived, even though they were at work and were not actually on call or on roster. This demonstrates not only how vital the on call stations are to the rural community but how, with changes to operational procedures and other factors I have been proposing, availability for these stations can be improved. Since then, there have been field fires including a major one in my ward the day after the fire authority meeting requiring ten fire engines and a water carrier and took over twelve hours to extinguish. Given that prevention is better than cure, and to ensure our on call fire crews are available to support incidents elsewhere rather than having to attend any locally, will you arrange for the Council's communications team, working with others as necessary, to raise awareness of fire risk not just generally but especially in the current spell of weather?"

In response, Councillor Maple gave thanks to the firefighters looking at the issue raised, which had taken place the day after the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting, and also to the firefighters across the country, for the incredible work they had been doing over the past few months.

Councillor Maple advised that the wildfire in Grain was a good example of what had been seen across the country. 12 hours for an incident of that nature was quite a short period of time, for which he was grateful. He also placed on record his thanks and confidence in the senior management of Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue. It was important to note, in view of all the debate, that there was a senior management team seeking to ensure financial sustainability and operational improvements as they saw it.

In relation to the specific point raised by the question, Medway Council and Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue were close partners working to support one another. One way that this was achieved was by sharing awareness and prevention messages. The Council's Communications Team regularly shared awareness posts from the Fire Service, in addition to sharing posts from central Government and other critical partner agencies. Since 22 May 2026, the Communications Team had been sharing guidance specifically in relation to wildfires from both the Fire Service and from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

During the Grain wildfire, without hesitation or having been contacted to ask, Communications had proactively shared Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue's Facebook posts and worked out of hours to ensure residents in the immediate area and wider Medway area, stayed safe. The Communications Team had worked hard to reach the widest audiences and recognised during the summer that posts performed best posted as a story. Between 17 and 23 August alone, 13 stories had been shared in relation to wildfires, which had reached several thousand people. Councillor Maple had no doubt that they would continue to support Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue in the summer period and throughout the year to raise awareness of seasonal risks and threats.