

Regeneration, Culture and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 June 2026

Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Zoe Van Dyke, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Summary

This annual report provides an account of the role of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management. 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. Recommendation

1.1. The Committee are asked to note the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.2 The areas within the terms of reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management, as set out in the Council's constitution are:

- Bereavement and Registration Services
- Property
- Facilities Management

3. Background

3.1. Business Management is a diverse portfolio with a number of vital areas within the Council's remit. It has had an exceptionally busy year, with some real successes and significant changes. I commend the continued efforts of the teams that carry out the vital work of the services within my portfolio, for their continued enthusiasm and dedication for both their work, and for the residents of Medway.

3.2. Our Facilities Management and Capital Projects teams are responsible for most the Council's buildings operations where the Council retains

responsibility for them, ensuring that they are safe and well maintained, in line with the Medway Council Corporate Asset Strategy.

3.3. Facilities Management Updates

- 3.3.1 Facilities Management (FM) issued Norse Group a letter of termination of services in April 2025, giving 12 month's notice to disaggregate FM services from the Joint Venture (JV) Core contract. The FM Contracts Manager and FM Contract Consultant worked with Senior Management in Medway Norse to continue service delivery, with the Compliance and Building Safety Manager continuing to monitor statutory compliance and report to the Corporate Landlord Board.
- 3.3.2 During September 2025, the FM team began undertaking a tendering process with Category Management, for a new hybrid FM services delivery model to start 01 April 26. In January 2026, Cabinet agreed to disaggregate FM services from Medway Norse and the JV, and at cease of business on the 31st March, FM services were handed over to the new in-house FM Delivery Team, with statutory compliance managed through robust Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) via the Technical Team, headed up by the Compliance and Building Safety Manager and the Compliance Technical Officer.
- 3.3.3 Significant works went into the TUPE of staff from Medway Norse FM to the council and other service providers prior to the last day of Medway Norse delivering FM services for Medway Council.

3.4. Capital Projects Update

- 3.4.1 We currently have circa 40 schemes at various stages, around 20 projects in contract within Capital Projects, and circa 25 within our forward plan that will be developed through the year totalling approximately £70million (Subject to approvals) of works on our Contracts register Report (CRR). Some of our key projects during 2025-2026 have included:
- 3.4.2 Works have progressed at the Brook theatre with most of the strip out works complete, along with the re tanking of the basement and essential works to stop historical leaks that have undermined the integrity of the build. Further major Structural repairs are underway within the rest of the building in order to make the facility structurally sound. Works have been carried out this year to address the Roof at the Central theatre to make watertight and structurally sound.
- 3.4.3 Works on site to the New Aut Even Children's home in Rainham are nearing completion in June which will provide a new essential facility for children services. Along with these improvements to Eden House in Upnor have been completed.
- 3.4.4 Leisure has seen improvements carried out at Hoo Swimming pool with a replacement more efficient boiler along with plans to address the Air Handling within the site and improve offering to the public. Medway Park has works well

underway to expand their junior gym facility on site for completion in the summer.

- 3.4.5 Education have had several School maintenance condition schemes carried out this year including a roof replacement at Swingate Primary school and various Fire Risk Assessment and Asbestos works in order to keep out maintained schools safe.
- 3.4.6 Libraries have seen improved storage facilities installed at their Rainham Library Site making use of redundant space to the rear of the building.
- 3.4.7 Gun Wharf Improvement Project Works are progressing as per programme with the recent award to Apex Construction to carry out the refurbishment works, noting these include addressing historical Health and Safety and accessibility issues within the building, the consolidation of a multi-purpose chambers facility within the building, along with renovation improvements to the again materials within the build so as to make the site more sustainable and a better place to work.
- 3.4.8 Gun Wharf Works to make the RAAC concrete within the building have recently been completed along with works to repair the roofs and gullies to negate against future roof leaks. We have also completed the New CCTV control room on Level 2 in Gun wharf in which our partners Kyndi are operating from, freeing up the former site in Strood.

3.5. Marine Asset Management Updates

- 3.5.1 This year has been a productive year for Gillingham Pier, with new signage installed, berth holder income increased through enforcement action, two boat wrecks removed from harbour area, extension to warehouse tenancies and end to long term peppercorn rent to one tenant. Further, signage and wayfinding have been improved. A plan has also been put in place for the harbour area to be dredged by Spring 2027, to enable improved tidal window for berth holders and visiting vessels and increase pier income to fund further improvements for parking, signage and basic maintenance.
- 3.5.2 At Sun Pier, the pontoon's dry dock has been docked, repaired and repainted to extend the life of the asset. To continue this work, the coming financial year includes plans for extensive decking repairs and improved security fencing to reduce anti-social behaviour and risk of squat mooring.
- 3.5.3 Rochester Pier has had a comprehensive condition report of the upper section completed and this will provide informed options for future use. We have ambition to include a full restoration of the asset, to bring back into use mooring facilities with potential to generate income.
- 3.5.4 At Rochester Riverside a condition survey of river wall was completed as well as work to improve access to the river from Furrells Park to assist with river rescues. Completion of a disabled access ramp at Limehouse Landing has helped improve river tour boat facilities and Limehouse Landing has successfully secured Rochester as a port for Waverley paddle steamers

annual sailing programme. Significant maintenance works to Rochester Riverside river wall are planned for the coming year to build on existing progress, including repairs to tie back bolts on sheet pile at Gashouse Point and establishment of a 5-year contract for salt marsh vegetation maintenance and clearance within Common and Blue Boar Creeks, which is anticipated to be completed by Autumn 2027.

- 3.5.5 Nor Marsh, owned by the council, has been identified for potential salt marsh restoration by the Environment Agency, Natural England and Peel Ports, site joint working with Zoological Society of London to establish sea grass planting to improve biodiversity.

3.6. Valuation and Asset Management

- 3.6.1 The Pentagon Shopping Centre continues to be a focus for the Head of Valuation and Asset Manager, coordinating asset value initiatives through the contract with New River Retail, but also supporting wider Council community and business centre initiatives for the Centre. The James Williams Healthy Living Centre (HLC) capital project is complete and new public toilet facilities have been provided on the first floor. Council strategy to convert Mountbatten House into residential accommodation and the wider efforts to increase residential units will support footfall in the Pentagon and town centre regeneration.
- 3.6.2 The surveyors in the VAM service continue to focus on rent reviews, lease renewals and other property and land transactions including disposals, together with advisory services for regeneration projects.
- 3.6.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) in its report dated January 2024, amongst other things recommended that the Council should carry out a property review to identify surplus non-operational property assets, which can be disposed of to reduce debt, and that the Council should also identify other property assets, including operational properties, which are attractive to the market and where their sale could contribute to Medway's longer-term financial sustainability.
- 3.6.4 The aim of the review was to generate at least £20M from capital receipts over the next 5 years from 2025/26 onwards. the review was conducted in 2024/25, and various operational and non- operational properties were declared surplus by Cabinet.
- 3.6.5 In 2025/26, the Council disposed of eighteen properties, which generated capital receipts of just under £19.5M. Meaning that the Council was only 2.5% away from achieving its 5-year target in one year. using the receipts to avoid and/or pay off debt will generate ongoing net revenue savings of £530,548pa. One of the disposals, also generated a one- off capital saving of £20,735.
- 3.6.6 Discussions with Medway NHS Foundation trust on the possibility of the former Debenhams site in Chatham being a base to deliver additional healthcare facilities was formally concluded in October 2025. The NHS

determined that, due to funding constraints, the proposal was not financially viable and therefore could not proceed.

- 3.6.7 Following the NHS's withdrawal, the Council is now moving forward with plans for a mixed-use scheme, potentially incorporating both commercial and residential development. We are currently assessing the most effective delivery route to maximise the site's economic, social, and placemaking benefits.

3.7 Registrations Updates

- 3.7.1 Elsewhere within my portfolio, it was a continued busy time for registrations with 4394 birth registrations in 2025/2026 with 98% being registered within the target 42 days of birth. Priority of service provision has always been given to the registration of deaths for reasons of public health.
- 3.7.2 In 2025/2026 2813 deaths were registered with 99.32% of informants being offered an appointment within the target 2 working days of notification (a 1.2% improvement against the previous year).
- 3.7.3 814 marriages were registered in the 2025/2026 against 803 registered in 2024/2025. This slight increase in overall numbers together with a decrease in the percentage of these ceremonies being small and inexpensive may indicate that the cost-of-living effect has stabilized, giving more confidence in future forecasts.
- 3.7.4 2504 Notices of Marriage were taken in 2025/2026 against 2309 in the previous year (a potential increase of 97 ceremonies).
- 3.7.5 Medway Register Office facilitated the granting of British Citizenship to 588 foreign nationals in 2024/2025. The majority of these were at the large monthly ceremonies taking place at the Queens Hall in the Corn Exchange Rochester. These larger ceremonies give an opportunity for the Mayor and Deputy Lieutenant of Kent to engage with new citizens. 48 citizens chose to have smaller private ceremonies for an additional fee.
- 3.7.6 In June 2025 Medway submitted its annual performance report to the Registrar General's Office (the General Register Office) and received the following assessment.
- “Thank you for submitting your Annual Performance Report for 2024/25. GRO would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank Medway Registration Service for the hard work undertaken during the year. Local Registration Services (LRS) have faced another extremely challenging period, particularly regarding the continuing financial pressures on Local Authorities and the implementation of the Death Certification Reform (DCR) changes introduced across England and Wales.”
- 3.7.7 The past year has seen registration timeliness for Births and Still Births maintain Medway's attainment at the statutory targets along with an improvement to 92% in Death registrations, all this whilst seeing an increase

in numbers post Death Certification Reform of 13%. May I again extend my gratitude to your team for their work with me through this Audit.

- 3.7.8 The 2025/26 reporting year will see significant transformation activity across the LRS, as Digital Registration Service (DRS) implementation progresses, and the Data (Use and Access) Bill continues its passage through the parliamentary process.”
- 3.7.9 Medway Registration Service continues to run at cost neutral levels, with no burden on the public purse.

3.8 Bereavement Services

- 3.8.1 Cremation and burial statistics for the last 5 years are shown in the below table:

Calendar Year	Total Cremations	Total Burials
2025	1997	341
2024	1933	342
2023	2056	329
2022	2461	351
2021 (Covid pandemic)	2794	442

- 3.8.2 The Service saw a large increase in cremations during the pandemic with so many people passing away before their time. Following the unprecedented increase in funerals the following years would naturally decrease, which we have seen.
- 3.8.3 It would seem that we have returned to an equilibrium of an expected 2,000 cremations & 340 burials per annum.
- 3.8.4 It is also worth noting that Medway Crematorium worked with Bluebell Cemetery, whilst they built their Crematorium, as Medway and Maidstone shared the cremating of their funerals. This ran from 2020 to 2022 where Medway was cremating on average around 400 (extra) per year
- 3.8.5 The increase in demand for “Direct Cremations” (a cremation without a funeral service) has continued. With the rising costs of Funerals, I believe this increase is due to financials. The table below highlights the increase in demand:

Calendar Year	Total Cremations	Direct Cremations	%
2024	1997	314	16%
2024	1933	246	13%
2023	2056	238	12%
2022	2461	645	26% *
2020-21 (Covid pandemic)	5,472	531	10%
2017-19	1992	95	5%

*Bluebell Cemetery cremations were recorded as “Direct Cremations”

- 3.8.6 With the current Cremators installed 2018/19 we are now operating at 99% abated cremations in 2025. Like all machines there are occasions where there are issues which means we by-pass the abated system. There are also two occasions through the year during service maintenance where cremations need to be reviewed in the by-pass system, hence why this is not 100%
- 3.8.7 Obitus, the company who supplies Webcasting and Visual Tributes of funerals continue to be popular. In 2025 this has brought in around £39,000 of additional income.
- 3.8.8 Bereavement Services continues to see a large referral rate for Public Health Funerals, receiving 27 referrals in 2025. Through our processes we managed to find families for 11 of the referrals, who then took on funeral arrangements. Through property searches and liaising with Banks the department also managed to recover around £10,000 of costings.

4. Providing political leadership and challenge

- 4.1. I meet regularly with the Deputy Director for Place and Assistant Director for Regeneration, and Heads of Service to discuss progress against service and council plan objectives.
- 4.2. I continue to work closely with teams to ensure that crucial long-term projects such as the Gun Wharf improvement project and the Operational Property Disposals review are meeting expectation, and I continue to be updated in advance of agenda items going to the Corporate Landlord Board to ensure I have suitable oversight and the opportunity to comment.

4.3. I was actively involved in the 25/26 budgetary meetings and mid-term financial planning prioritisation helping to ensure that budgetary constraints are balanced against the needs of Medway and vital services.

5. Support for key service areas

5.1 There is a continued inflationary pressure on projects due to events outside of the Council's control. We continue to work to mitigate impacts that are identified and recorded on our risk registers and reviewed regularly.

6 Conclusion

6.1 I am proud to work with such hardworking officers who provide an essential role in helping ensure Medway is a great place to live, to work and to visit. I look forward to continuing to engage and work with them and others to further progress such important aspects of the Council's work.

Lead officer contact

Ruth Dulieu, Deputy Director for Place Ruth.Dulieu@medway.gov.uk

Sunny Ee, Assistant Director for Regeneration Sunny.Ee@medway.gov.uk

James Brown, Head of Registrations James.Brown@medway.gov.uk

Tom Moore, Cremations Manager Tom.Moore@medway.gov.uk

Daniel Stone, Head of Facilities Management and Capital Projects
Daniel.Stone@medway.gov.uk

Edwina Crowley, Head of Valuation and Asset Management
Edwina.Crowley@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None