



# Medway Urban Community Facilities Survey Report

March 2018



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## Executive Summary

In 2017, Medway Council Planning Service carried out a survey of community facilities in urban Medway. It covered community halls, places of worship, libraries and community service centres. This survey received around a 40% response rate from a range of community facilities across urban Medway, from the very smallest up to some very large facilities. The research revealed that the majority of these community facilities are used by the general public and accommodate a considerable range of activities, serving broad user groups. Most facilities can be booked and are available around the clock. Most facilities were reported to be in good condition, though most would like to have more room to continue to offer the range of activities to users, anticipating an increased demand and planning to expand at some point in the future. The range of uses demonstrated the important role of these facilities in supporting community activities and contributing to the quality of life in Medway.

## 1. Background

### Introduction

The purpose of the survey was to provide the Council with a comprehensive list of community facilities within Medway's urban areas and gather supporting information about their quality, size, usage and future need. The urban area surveyed covered from Frindsbury to Rainham and the suburbs to the south. It did not include the villages on the Hoo Peninsula, Medway Valley and Lower Rainham, which have been previously surveyed.

This will provide the necessary evidence to determine if current provision is sufficient and where future investments might need to be targeted to upgrade facilities and extend capacity, where shortfalls are identified. Information collected in the survey will be used as part of the evidence base for the new Medway Local Plan, and also in considering the need for infrastructure funding associated with new developments.

This survey complements the Medway Village Infrastructure Audit completed in 2015, which also forms part of the Local Plan evidence base. This is being used to help develop policies for rural areas in Medway and assist in assessing what infrastructure investments may be needed in villages. Details of this audit are available on the Medway Council website at:

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Medway%20Village%20Infrastructure%20Audit%20January%202017.pdf>

## What is a community facility?

A community facility is defined as either:

- a building or space where community led activities for community benefit are the primary use and the facility is managed, occupied or used primarily by the voluntary and community sector;
- or
- buildings used by the community as secondary to their main purpose, such as single interest group buildings (WI, clubs, Cub/Scout and Guide huts etc.) and church halls.

## Community facilities benefit

A wide range of activities can take place within community facilities including: parent and toddler groups, IT training, bingo, dancing and meetings of community groups.

Community facilities make an important contribution to the quality of life of a neighbourhood and can be an invaluable asset to a settlement, providing a venue for a range of social activities.

Therefore, protecting, improving and making provision for new community facilities will help to maintain and improve the quality of life enjoyed by Medway's residents.

Community halls for example are important to residential neighbourhoods for promoting health and well-being, sustainable communities and community cohesion.

These facilities are recognised in planning policy as important in meeting the social needs of sustainable development.

## Survey approach

The council used its register of businesses and properties in Medway to identify community buildings across the urban areas – this list included community centres, church halls, libraries and places of worship. The urban area covered the main towns and suburban neighbourhoods across Medway.

Community facilities were identified via the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG), using addresses listed under: 'Community Services', Leisure and Places of Worship.

A questionnaire and covering letter were posted to just over two hundred addresses, with a request included to gather details of key contacts for future use and consultation purposes. The information was posted to the facilities in August 2017, with a return deadline of September. Email contact

details for the council's Planning Service were included for those wishing to request an electronic form, and many respondents choose to respond via email. The survey was also useful in assisting the Planning Service in gathering up-to-date contact details for community facilities.

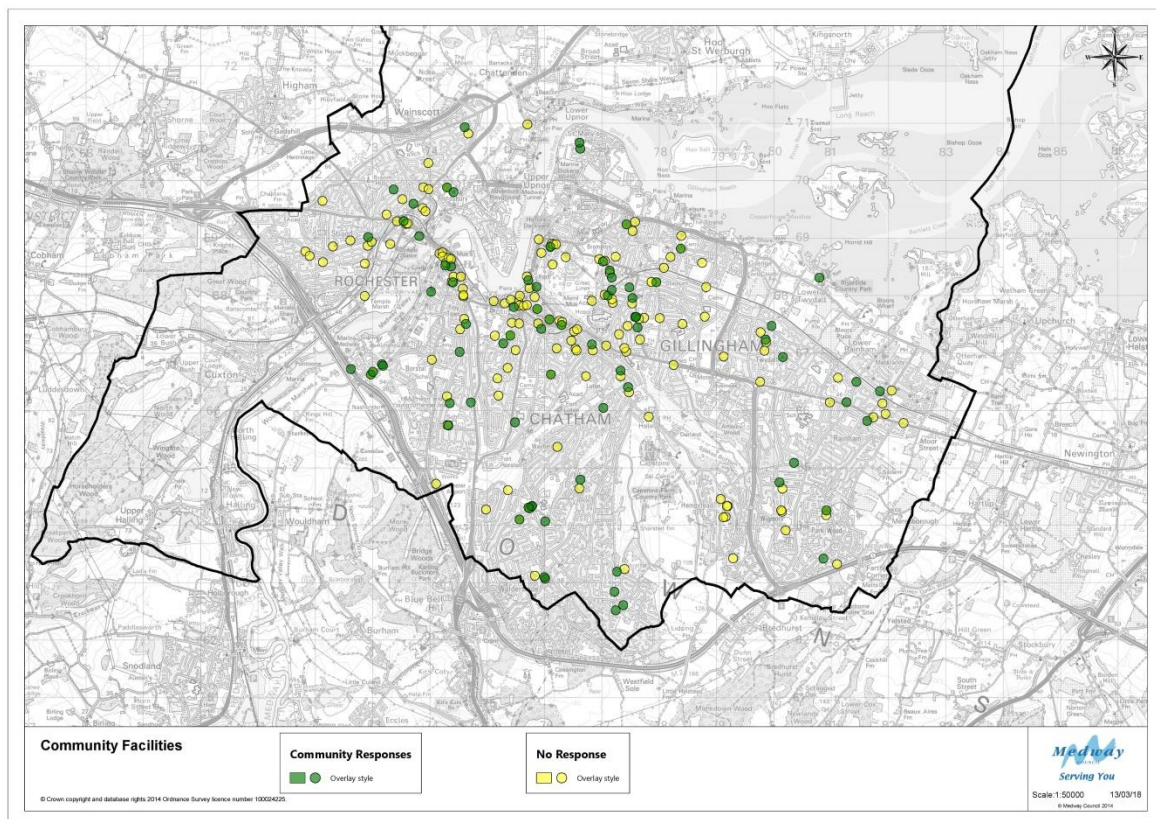
The facilities fall into the following broad categories:

- Public/Community Hall/Other community facilities;
- Church Hall /Religious meeting hall/Hall;
- Community Service Centre Office;
- Library;
- Place of worship.

The chart on the next page shows that 'places of worship' and 'community halls' account for the majority of community facilities in this sample, with these two categories accounting for around four-fifths of the sample.

## Geographic coverage

The map below illustrates the distribution of addresses from which a response was received (green dots) - the grey dots illustrate where the other identified community facilities are located, but where no response was received. The responses reflected a spread across the urban area of Medway.

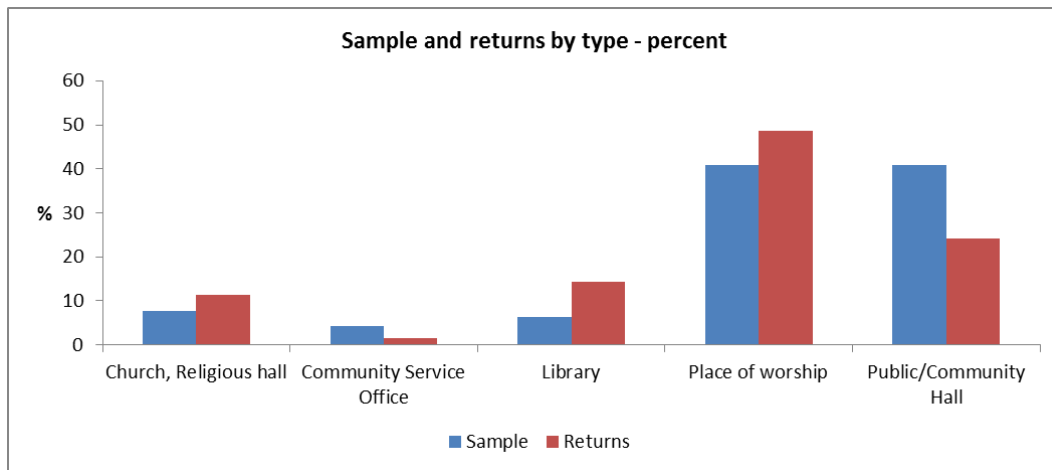


## 2. Survey Results

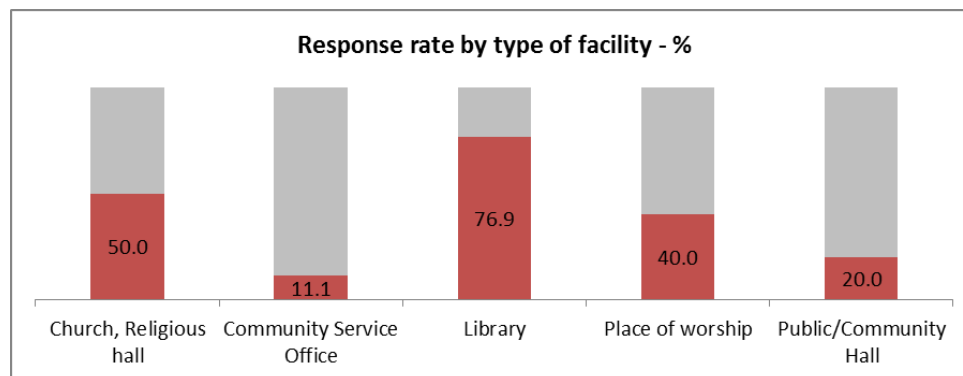
### Response rate

The survey was well supported, with just over eighty returns; this represents just under 40% of facilities identified returning a completed form.

The chart below indicates that 'places of worship' had the highest number of responses across the five category types.



<b>Representation of community facility type</b>				
	All facilities contacted		Proportion of all returns - %	Return rate - %
	Number	%		
Church/Religious hall	16	7.7	11.4	50.0
Community Service Office	9	4.3	1.4	11.1
Library	13	6.3	14.3	76.9
Place of worship	85	40.9	48.6	40.0
Public/Community Hall	85	40.9	24.3	20.0



### 3. Findings

#### Response summary

- **Access** - just under three-quarters of community facilities in this sample are used by the general public, in that they are not restricted to a particular group and can be booked for use.
- **Users** – most facilities are used by a wide range of groups; ‘parent & baby’ groups and activities for older people were most common.
- **Availability** - There appears to be wide ranging ‘opening times’, with most facilities being available for use in the evenings and at weekends.
- **Level of use/capacity** - there is much need for the community facilities in this sample with a high level of current usage. On average facilities are regularly used by twelve different groups, with most facilities having between 6 and 15 regular user groups. The average capacity of facilities was 25 people, with a wide range in scale of facilities, accommodating from seven up to over five hundred people.
- **Location** – A large majority of facilities were described as being well located for users in terms of walking distance and public transport (94%).
- **Facilities** - The majority of facilities had a hall with kitchen and toilets. Many have a meeting room, but many appear not to have sufficient storage space.
- **Condition** – Just under three-quarters of facilities were reported as being in good condition, a fifth are described as fair and just four as in poor condition.
- **Demand/future plans** – four out of five facilities reported the likelihood of a greater demand in future. There were no reports of a ‘lesser demand’; the rest of the sample did not answer this question. Just over half of the sample expressed plans to expand or upgrade their facilities.



## Response – detail

The following section provides fuller details of the responses by theme:

	<b>Access</b>
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Just under three-quarters of community facilities in this sample are open to the general public and can be booked for use.

A minority of facilities which have ‘restrictions’ are church halls; these require the use of facilities to be ‘worship’ oriented and/or linked specifically to charity activities.

Other private facilities have restrictions to access based on membership.

	<b>Users</b>
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Most facilities are used by a wide range of groups; ‘parent & baby’ groups and activities for older people were most common, however on average facilities were used by groups across five of the following broad user categories according to the facilities available:

- Parent and baby;
- Pre-school;
- Youth;
- Older people;
- Cubs/brownies/scouts/guides;
- Sports/exercise/fitness;
- Drama, music, dance;
- Hobbies (other);
- Health.



## Availability

There appears to be wide ranging 'opening times', with most facilities being available for use in the evenings and at weekends. Evenings had the lowest level of availability, with some facilities restricted to day-time opening times. However with good general availability overall, 7 of 10 facilities are either being used or are available to be used in the evenings.

Clearly restrictions apply to religious facilities, with times of worship taking priority and a small minority of facilities being available only by appointment or having restrictions where other, more regular activities took priority.



## Level of use & available capacity

On average facilities are regularly used by twelve groups, with most facilities having between 6 and 15 groups as regular users.

The average capacity of facilities was 25 people, with a wide range in scale of facilities, from seven up to over five hundred people.

A number of facilities reported great variation in usage for example very high when hosting festivals or other large events. Others have variation within different parts of the facility with different maximum capacities applying to different areas in the building, for example ranging from 30-250 in one facility.

A small minority expressed an inability to meet demand, stating that demand for their facilities was in excess of what they could accommodate and that in some cases potential users had to be turned away.



## Location

A large majority of facilities were described as being well located for users in terms of walking distance and/or public transport (94%). Most were on a bus route and/or located near to a bus stop. Many were centrally located, near to residential areas and/or transport links.

In terms of catchment areas, there were a wide range of responses to this issue. Most stated that they did not have a catchment area as such and that users came from within and

beyond Medway's boundary, depending on the type of use. Many highlighted as a priority the need to serve the needs of their local community.



## Facilities

The majority of facilities had a hall with kitchen and toilets. Many have a meeting room, but many appear not to have sufficient storage space, with under half stating they had any storage and a number confirming that what they had was insufficient.

Over half of facilities had parking that was available for users and as with a wide range of facility sizes the amount of parking available varied greatly.



## Condition

Just under three-quarters of facilities were reported as being in good condition. One fifth are described as fair and just four as in poor condition.

The majority of those in fair or poor condition had plans to upgrade facilities.

Those facilities in poor condition have issues relating to the age of the building, with poor heating, plumbing and inadequate noise insulation being cited for example.

Those facilities in fair condition similarly appear to have issues relating to older buildings, however the issues appear to be less immediate, relating more to issues of poor appearance and the general need to improve facilities to create a more pleasant environment for users.



## Future plans

Just over half of the sample expressed plans to expand or upgrade their facilities. A range of plans are in place for improvements such as:

- extending and general renovation;
- interior and exterior improvements;
- new shower rooms;
- improved kitchen;
- better signage;
- improved disabled access.

Unsurprisingly there appears to be a strong correlation between planning to improve facilities and the identification of an increasing future demand, with nine in ten of those facilities planning to upgrade facilities predicting a growing future demand.

It is encouraging that many facilities recognise the importance of the local community being able to access 'space' for events and the effort being directed towards upgrading facilities.

A number of respondents recognised that growth in Medway - as well as some other factors - will lead to a greater need for community facilities. For example, there is likely to be a greater and growing demand for those facilities providing childcare support, with the increase in hours in government funded child care entitlement.

## Conclusion

The findings of this survey feed into the Local Plan evidence base and has provided up-to-date contact details for many of Medway's key community facilities. This means contacts who have expressed an interest in Local Plan progress can be kept informed. The evidence will be updated as and when necessary, to ensure that an accurate picture of local requirements is maintained for Local Plan and wider planning purposes.

Overall, the details gathered in this survey highlight the value of community facilities, with confirmation of a considerable level of demand for such facilities. It is essential that these facilities are able to continue to serve the needs of the community and sufficient community space, of a suitable quality is maintained to serve a growing population.

As new development comes forward over the course of the Local Plan period, the council will consider the infrastructure upgrades needed to support growing communities. This will include consideration of the needs for improved community facilities, and where appropriate funding from developer contributions.

## Appendix 1 - Questionnaire form

### Medway Council - Community facility questionnaire

If you would like an electronic version of this form, please contact:

Email: [planning.policy@medway.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@medway.gov.uk)

*This questionnaire relates to your community facility and is divided into four sections: Use of facility, building facilities, building conditions and future plans for the facility.*

#### Organisation/group contact details

Name of hall/centre/group	
Address	
Email	
Your name and job title	
<i>Please tick box if you would like your details added to our Local Plan database</i>	
<i>Please tick box if you would like a copy of our Community Facilities report</i>	

#### Use of facilities

Q1) What is the main use of your building?		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Community use <i>E.g. Village hall/ centre</i>		
Place of worship		
Other		

<b>Q2) Is your building open to all members of the community or are you restricted in any way to who can use your building(s)?</b>		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Yes		
No		
Restrictions		

<b>Q3) What type of groups use your facilities?</b>		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments: other groups?</i>
Parent and baby		
Pre-school		
Youth groups		
Older peoples groups		
Scouts/Guides/Brownies/Cubs		
Sport/exercise/fitness e.g. Keep fit, Pilates, Zumba		
Drama/music/dance		
Other hobby related e.g. bingo, whist, chess.		
Health (medical)		

<b>Q4) Is/are your building(s) available for private hire?</b>		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Yes		
No		

<b>Q5) When are your buildings open for use? Do you have any restrictions?</b>			
<i>Please tick:</i>			<i>Restrictions/comments:</i>
Mon- Fri	Mornings		
	Afternoons		
	Evenings		
Weekends			

<b>Q6) How many groups regularly use your facilities? Is there a maximum capacity?</b>		
<i>Please specify:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
No of groups		
Max capacity		

<b>Q7) Do your facilities have a user catchment area?</b>		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
No		
Yes <i>(indicate below)</i>		
Extent		
Medway and beyond		
Within Medway		
Neighbourhood		
Village/Town		
Other		

<b>Q8) Is your facility well located for users in terms of walking distance, public transport?</b>		
<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Yes		
No		



**Building – facilities**

Q9) Do the buildings have the following uses?		
	Please tick:	Number
Hall(s) (please indicate number)		
Meeting room(s) (please indicate number)		
Toilets		
Kitchen		
Storage		
	Please tick:	No of spaces (approx.)
Car park		

**Building condition**

Q10) How would you rate the general condition of the building?		
	Please tick:	Comments:
Good		
Fair		
Poor		

**Future**

**Q11) Do you anticipate a greater or lesser demand for the use of your facilities by the local community over the next 5-10 years?**

<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Greater demand		
Lesser demand		

**Q12) Are there any plans or aims to update/upgrade/expand the facilities on offer?**

<i>Please tick:</i>		<i>Comments:</i>
Yes		
No		

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.*

**Please return this form by 8 September 2017 to:**

Planning Policy, Regeneration, Community, Environment and Transformation  
Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TR

**You can send a scanned copy to: [planning.policy@medway.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@medway.gov.uk)**

Please note that the information you provide is only used for Planning purposes. Your contact details will be stored securely and we will not share your personal information with others. We will record the information on this survey form for the purpose of preparing a new Local Plan for Medway, and will be deleted when no longer needed.

If you have any queries, please contact Medway Council's Planning Policy team on telephone 01634 331629 or email: [planning.policy@medway.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@medway.gov.uk)