

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Tuesday 17 January 2023
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors McKenna (Chairman), Newton (Vice-Chairman), Bartlett, Brindle, Fort, Khadka, Rose, R Webb and Young

The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.

<u>AGENDA</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
1. Apologies for Absence	
2. Notification of Substitute Members	
3. Urgent Items	
4. Notification of Visiting Members	
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers	
6. Disclosures of Lobbying	
7. To consider whether any item needs to be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.	
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 19 December 2022 adjourned to 19 December 2022	1 - 7
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)	
10. Question and Answer Session from Local Residents (if any)	
11. Questions from Members to the Chairman (if any)	
12. Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference	8 - 16
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Issued on Monday 9 January 2023

Continued Over/:

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

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| 15. Medium Term Financial Strategy and Saving Proposals 2023/24 | 60 - 88 |
| 16. Property acquisition for 1,000 affordable homes programme - Staplehurst Ward | 89 - 98 |
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PART II

To move that the public be excluded for the items set out in Part II of the Agenda because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test.

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

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| 18. Exempt Minutes of the Meeting Held on 19 December 2022 | Paragraph 3 –
Financial/Business
Affairs | To Follow |
| 19. Exempt Appendices - Property acquisition for 1,000 affordable homes programme - Staplehurst Ward | Paragraph 3 –
Financial/Business
Affairs | 111 - 112 |
| 20. Exempt Appendices - Property Acquisition for 1000 homes programme - Bridge Ward | Paragraph 3 –
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INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

In order to ask a question at this meeting, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on 13 January 2023). You will need to provide the full text in writing.

If your question is accepted, you will be provided with instructions as to how you can access the meeting.

In order to make a statement in relation to an item on the agenda, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on 13 January 2023). You will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on.

If you require this information in an alternative format please contact us, call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk.

To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit www.maidstone.gov.uk.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2022 ADJORNED TO 19 DECEMBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors McKenna (Chairman), Bartlett, Fort, Young, Cleator and Conyard
Lead Members:	Councillors Round (Lead Member for Environmental Services) and S Webb (Lead Member for Housing and Health)

79. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received by Councillors Newton, Khadka and R Webb.

80. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Conyard was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Khadka.

Councillor Cleator was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Rose.

81. URGENT ITEMS

There was one urgent item, which was the updated Appendix 1 to Item 15 – Granada House Refurbishment and was required for the consideration of the item. The Appendix was circulated on Thursday 8 December.

82. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Burton was in attendance as a Visiting Member for Item 13 - Fees and Charges 2023/24, Item 14 – Equalities Policy and Action Plan – Update, Item 15 – Mid Kent Waste Collection Contract and Item 16 – Granada House Refurbishment.

83. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

84. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

85. EXEMPT ITEMS.

RESOLVED: That all Items be taken in public unless any Member of the Committee wished to specifically refer to any of the information contained within Item 17 – Exempt Appendix 2 to Item 15 – Mid Kent Waste Collection Contract

and Item 18 – Exempt Appendix to Item 16 – Granada House Refurbishment, in which case the Committee would enter into closed session due to likely disclosure of exempt information.

86. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 November 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

87. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

88. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

89. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members.

90. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

91. FEES AND CHARGES 2023/24

The Lead Member for Environmental Services introduced the report and explained that whilst the Head of Finance was not present, all of the relevant information had been included within the report.

The Director of Regeneration and Place advised that he and the Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm may be able to answer any questions, or provide additional information outside of the meeting if required. To assist in the Committee's consideration of the report, the Leader of the Council advised that the Executive had been considering the matter in great detail and welcomed the Committee's views on the issue.

In response to questions, the Head of Environment Services and Public Realm explained that the fly-tipping fixed penalty notice (FPN) fee was set at the statutory maximum. The fees were ring-fenced for reinvestment into the service, with the example given being the purchase of additional cameras. Depending on the severity of the fly-tipping, either an FPN would be issued, or the Council would attempt to prosecute the individuals involved; although the former was preferred given the ongoing delay to court proceedings arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. It was stated that FPNs for littering could also be issued where appropriate.

In response to further questions, the Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm confirmed that the Council could seize vehicles believed to be involved in fly-tipping. If unclaimed, the vehicle was scrapped or sold with any income generated used to cover the services cost.

In response to concerns arising from the proposed increase in trade waste collections and whether this would impact the service's use, the Head of Environment Services and Public Realm explained that the fees proposed were competitive in comparison to other local authorities, and provided greater flexibility to customers. For example, fortnightly collections could be arranged if required and a greater number of town centre businesses had been using the service due to its flexibility. The fees proposed would recover the cost of the service which had also increased.

The Head of Environmental Services and Public Realm explained as both the trade waste collection and fly-tipping services were managed by the same teams, any changes in trends would be visible and could be investigated.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That;

1. The contents of the report be noted; and
2. The Executive be recommended to approve the Fees and Charges as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

92. EQUALITIES POLICY AND ACTION PLAN - UPDATE

The Chairman stated that the item was due to be withdrawn as the Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement was unable to attend the meeting.

The Leader of the Council stated that as the matter was not time sensitive, it would be re-presented at the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED: That Item 14 – Equalities Policy and Action Plan Update be withdrawn from the agenda.

93. MID KENT WASTE COLLECTION CONTRACT

The Lead Member for Environmental Services introduced the report and explained in March 2021 the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee agreed to remain within the Mid Kent Waste Partnership (MKWP), alongside Ashford and Swale Borough Councils. The Mid Kent Waste Collection Contract had been tendered and one bid had been received.

The Committee were informed that the bid had been considered against the evaluation criteria agreed by the MKWP, scoring 81.88 out of 100. The service proposed would allow for the collection of food waste, refuse and recycling within the same vehicle at an increased payload to the vehicles currently used. Additionally, narrow access resources for garden waste would be provided to provide reliability and resilience to the service. The bidder had developed a partnership with Demelza Hospice Care to enable the reuse of bulky items where possible

The bid included the provision of improved vehicle tracking technology and improved management of customer services requests, to allow the waste team to have full visibility of the service's provision. Electric supervisor vans would be provided, with local sustainability champions and initiatives to be implemented at each depot. The other initiatives to be provided were outlined, to include the

extension the 'Go Green' initiative, skills and mental health training sessions, community and school events and internships, amongst other things.

It was proposed that the Council would allocate £5.8 million towards the fleet costs, to reduce the service's overall cost, based on the tender price and provision of an in-built contingency fund.

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified, having applied the Public Interest Test:

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Exempt Appendix 2 to Item 15 Mid Kent Waste Collection Contract	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
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The Committee entered into closed session between 7.01 p.m. to 7.10 p.m. and asked questions on the proposal's finances, including across future years of the contract's life.

The Committee expressed support for the proposal.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to;

1. Award the Mid Kent Waste Contract Bidder A;
2. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to issue a Letter of Intent to Bidder A to enable contract mobilisation to commence; and
3. Allocate £5.8 million capital funding is allocated for the purchase of Maidstone's waste collection fleet.

94. GRANADA HOUSE REFURBISHMENT

The Lead Member for Housing and Health introduced the report and explained that the Council purchased Granada House in 2016 as the town centre was due to be extended. The building was in poor condition. The Council had let the building on a long-term basis to Maidstone Property Holdings, however significant planned maintenance works were required, as there had been very little work undertaken since its construction in the 1930s.

The decommissioned Policy and Resources Committee had previously agreed the building's refurbishment. A tender exercise had taken place, but the Executive were dissatisfied with the value for money aspect of the bid received, and so a second procurement exercise is currently being undertaken. The projected cost as contained within Exempt Appendix 1 to the report had been set by the Executive.

If approved, the refurbishment works would provide benefits such as increased rental levels, increased demand for the apartments and a reduction in the cost of undertaking reactive repair works. The proposed works would take six months, likely commencing from March or April 2023. There would be an option to install

solar panels at further expenditure, although this would be considered at a later date once a contractor had been appointed.

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified, having applied the Public Interest Test:

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Exempt Appendix 1 to Item 16 Granada House Refurbishment	-	3 – Financial/Business Affairs.
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The Committee entered into closed session between 7.16 p.m. to 7.28 p.m. The questions raised focused on the specification's contents and the works projected costs, as contained within Exempt Appendix 1 to the report.

In response to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place stated that the relevant Council team and Pellings as the building surveyors would ensure that the specification achieved value for money, and the Council's Section 151 Officer, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement would have to sign-off the procurement process and finalised contract sum once agreed in accordance with the Council's financial procedure rules, which would include ensuring its value for money.

Several Members of the Committee felt that further clarification on the specifications contents was required, with particular reference made to ensuring that the building would be refurbished to a high standard within the projected cost envelope contained within Exempt Appendix 1 to the report and achieve value for money.

In response, the Director of Regeneration and Place reiterated that the previous tender exercise undertaken had resulted in the receipt of a bid at a significantly higher cost than the desired (by the Executive) cost envelope within Exempt Appendix 1 to the report. The bid was rejected by the Executive, with a second procurement exercise ongoing against a lower target scheme cost, with a value engineering exercise to be undertaken to achieve the best possible specification for the works. The director stated that priority would be given to ensuring the improving the external envelope the building and achieving compliance with health and safety requirements for the building's individual apartments, with value engineering to take place on certain components that could be refurbished rather than replaced. The director provided assurance that a suitable refurbishment could be completed within the target budget proposed. The issues, in terms of rapidly rising construction costs, being faced by the construction sector, were outlined.

Consideration was given to delaying the proposals consideration to the Committee's next meeting, to allow for further detail on the project specification to be provided to ensure that value for money was achieved in the use of public funds.

In response, the Director of Regeneration and Place strongly advised against delaying the proposals consideration for several reasons which included that the Council's obligations as a landlord needed to be met, particularly given the national focus on Housing Providers not prioritising disrepair within their

portfolios, the length of time since the building's purchase, to prevent a further loss of confidence from the professional firms working on the proposal and reduce additional costs through continued loss of rental income. The potential negative impact to the Council's reputation, alongside the risk that a poor-quality contractor could be appointed if the specification did not undergo a value engineering exercise, was also highlighted.

The Committee felt that the refurbishment works should be progressed without delay due to the importance of ensuring that the building was improved and made suitable for future use.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to:

1. Agree to carry out the proposed refurbishment works to Granada House up to the Total Scheme Cost as outlined in Table 1 within Exempt Appendix 1 – Financial Summary to the report.
2. Enter into contract with the preferred contractor to carry out the refurbishment works to Granada House.
3. Agree that:
 - a) Officers explore fully with Pelling's (the appointed Employers Agent) and the appointed Contractor the merits of providing solar PV to the property as a way of off-setting electrical use.
 - b) this option and additional expenditure (as outlined in Table 2 within Exempt Appendix 1 – Financial Summary to the report) is only pursued after consultation, post contract award with the Lead Member on the Executive for Housing and Health.
4. Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to enter into any related appointments, legal actions, deeds, contracts and agreements which may be required to facilitate the refurbishment works required.
5. Authorise the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is to appoint the Solicitors required to negotiate and complete the necessary contract documentation, deeds and agreements associated with the refurbishment works on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement.

95. EXEMPT APPENDIX 2 TO ITEM 15 - MID KENT WASTE COLLECTION CONTRACT

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 15 – Mid Kent Waste Collection Contract.

96. EXEMPT APPENDIX 1 TO ITEM 16 - GRANADA HOUSE REFURBISHMENT

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 16 – Granada House Refurbishment.

97. DURATION

6:30 p.m. until 7:48 p.m.


MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN FOR THE FOUR MONTH PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2023 TO 30 APRIL 2023

This Forward Plan sets out the details of the key decisions which the Executive or Lead Members expect to take and the non-Key decisions that the Executive or Lead Members expect to take during the next four-month period. The plan will be updated weekly for the relevant period and a new plan for a new four-month period, published monthly on the last Friday of the month.

A Key Decision is defined as one which:

1. Results in the Council incurring expenditure, or making savings, of more than £250,000; or
2. Is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more Wards in the Borough

The current members of the Executive are:

 <p>∞ Councillor David Burton Leader of the Council DavidBurton@maidstone.gov.uk 07590 229910</p>	 <p>Councillor John Perry Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Corporate Services JohnPerry@Maidstone.gov.uk 07770 734741</p>	 <p>Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement LottieParfittReid@Maidstone.gov.uk 07919 360000</p>	 <p>Councillor Martin Round Lead Member for Environmental Services MartinRound@maidstone.gov.uk 07709 263447</p>
 <p>Councillor Simon Webb Lead Member for Housing and Health SimonWebb@Maidstone.gov.uk 07878 018997</p>	 <p>Councillor Claudine Russell Lead Member for Leisure and Arts ClaudineRussell@Maidstone.gov.uk</p>	 <p>Councillor Paul Cooper Lead Member for Planning and Infrastructure PaulCooper@Maidstone.gov.uk 01622 244070</p>	

Anyone wishing to make representations about any of the matters listed below may do so by contacting the relevant officer listed against each decision, within the time period indicated.

Under the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the Council's Constitution, a Key Decision or a Part II decision may not be taken, unless it has been published on the forward plan for 28 days or it is classified as urgent:

The law and the Council's Constitution provide for urgent key and part II decisions to be made, even though they have not been included in the Forward Plan.

Copies of the Council's constitution, forward plan, reports and decisions may be inspected at the Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, ME15 6JQ or accessed from the Council's website: www.maidstone.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Executive which are normally held at the Town Hall, High St, Maidstone, ME14 1SY. The dates and times of the meetings are published on www.maidstone.gov.uk or you may contact the Democratic Services Team on telephone number 01622 602899 for further details.



David Burton
Leader of the Council

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
Equalities Policy and Action Plan - Update Annual Update report - providing an update on actions taken to meet objections, propose any revisions or changes	Executive	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	25 Jan 2023	No	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023	Equalities Policy and Action Plan - Update	Orla Sweeney orlasweeney@maidstone.gov.uk
Charges for Replacement Wheeled Bins Proposal to introduce charges for the replacement of damaged refuse and recycling wheeled bins, in line with the Mid Kent Waste Partnership.	Executive	Lead Member for Environmental Services	25 Jan 2023	No	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023	Charges for Replacement Wheeled Bins	Jennifer Stevens jenniferstevens@maidstone.gov.uk
Property Acquisition for 1000 homes programme Bridge Ward	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	25 Jan 2023	Yes	No Part exempt	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023	Property Acquisition for 1000 homes programme	Philip Morris philipmorris@maidstone.gov.uk

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
Property acquisition for 1,000 affordable homes programme Staplehurst Ward	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	25 Jan 2023	Yes	No Part exempt	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023	Property acquisition for 1,000 affordable homes programme	Shanaz Begum shanazbegum@maidstone.gov.uk
Medium Term Financial Strategy and Saving Proposals 2023/24 1 1	Executive	Lead Member for Environmental Services	25 Jan 2023	Yes	No Open	Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee 10 Jan 2023 Planning and Infrastructure Policy Advisory Committee 11 Jan 2023 Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023 Corporate Services Policy Advisory Committee 18 Jan 2023	Medium Term Financial Strategy and Saving Proposals 2023/24 (CHE PAC)	Mark Green markgreen@maidstone.gov.uk

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
<p>Strategic Plan refresh 2023-28 This report proposes refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028.</p> <p>12</p>	Executive	Leader of the Council	8 Feb 2023	Yes	No Open	<p>Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee 10 Jan 2023</p> <p>Planning and Infrastructure Policy Advisory Committee 11 Jan 2023</p> <p>Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 17 Jan 2023</p> <p>Corporate Services Policy Advisory Committee 18 Jan 2023</p>	Strategic Plan refresh 2023-28	<p>Anna Collier annacollier@maidstone.gov.uk</p>

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
Award of Arboricultural Services Contract Report to advise committee on the scope of the contract to provide tree pruning, tree safety works, planting and emergency call out service relating to Maidstone Borough Council owned land and tree stock. Committee are asked to endorse the award of contract to the selected company.	Lead Member for Environmental Services	Lead Member for Environmental Services	23 Feb 2023	Yes	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Award of Arboricultural Services Contract	Andrew Williams andrewwilliams@maidstone.gov.uk
Commissioning Support from the VCS Support services delivered by VCS	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	27 Feb 2023	No	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Commissioning Support from the VCS	Anna Collier annacollier@maidstone.gov.uk

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
<p>Review of Housing Assistance Policy (including DFG) This policy addresses a number of services and funding streams delivered from within the Housing and Community Services department, to include the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Help You Home scheme too. The document sets out how these funding streams are utilised to deliver the desired community benefits.</p>	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	22 Mar 2023	Yes	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Review of Housing Assistance Policy (including DFG)	<p>John Littlemore johnlittlemore@maidstone.gov.uk</p>

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
<p>Housing Strategy 2022-27</p> <p>The proposed themes for the new housing strategy were approved by the CHE Committee in early 2022, and these have since been subject to public consultation. Therefore the new housing strategy, as drafted, takes account of these consultation responses, and is now ready for consideration for adoption.</p>	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	22 Mar 2023	Yes	No Open	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Housing Strategy 2022-27	<p>John Littlemore</p> <p>johnlittlemore@maidstone.gov.uk</p>
<p>Property Acquisition for 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme</p> <p>Report regarding acquisition of site for 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme</p>	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	22 Mar 2023	Yes	No Part exempt	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Property Acquisition for 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme	<p>Philip Morris</p> <p>philipmorris@maidstone.gov.uk,</p>

Details of the Decision to be taken	Decision to be taken by	Lead Member	Expected Date of Decision	Key	Exempt	Proposed Consultees / Method(s) of Consultation	Documents to be considered by Decision taker	Representations may be made to the following officer by the date stated
Heather House and Royal British Legion site A report seeking approval to enter into contract with contractors for proposed works to Heather House and Royal British Legion Buildings.	Executive	Lead Member for Housing and Health	22 Mar 2023	Yes	No Part exempt	Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee 14 Feb 2023	Heather House and Royal British Legion site	Philip Morris, Alison Elliott philipmorris@maidstone.gov.uk, alisonelliott@maidstone.gov.uk

Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

17 January 2023

Equalities Policy and Action Plan refresh

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	17 January 2023
Executive	25 January 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Orla Sweeney, Senior Policy and Communities Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the current Equalities objectives and action plan.

A refreshed action plan has been developed in consultation with key service areas. The action plan was last revised in 2020 in response to the pandemic and the challenges faced in tackling disadvantage in Maidstone. It is important that it continues to reflect the current challenges faced by residents and staff so the Council can deliver on its Equalities objectives.

A light touch revision has been made to the current Equalities Policy. This is outlined at paragraph 2.17-2.21 in the report and is proposed to ensure recent legislative change are referenced in the Policy document.

Purpose of Report

To note the update on the current Equalities objectives and action plan.

To consider and recommend the changes to the Policy document and to consider and recommend the revised action plan to the Executive.

This report makes the following recommendations to the Executive:

1. To note the progress on the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update at appendix 1 to the report and outlined at paragraph 2.7-2.11 in the report.
 2. To consider and recommend the proposed changes to the Equalities Policy as attached at Appendix 2 of the report and outlined at paragraph 2.17-2.21.
 3. To consider and recommend the revised actions for the Equalities Action Plan as attached at Appendix 3 of the report and outlined at paragraph 2.22-2.29.
 4. To consider and recommend the inclusion of Poverty as an additional protected characteristic as outlined at paragraph 2.33.
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Equalities Policy and Action Plan refresh

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims in the delivery its strategic plan objectives.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendations help deliver the achievement of cross cutting objectives: Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced and Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Risk Management	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 of the report.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Head of Finance
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Legal	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under Equality Act 2010. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Equality Act 2010.	Mid Kent Legal Services Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. However some of the actions in the revised action plan could result in the collection and processing of personal data. Should this be	Information Governance Officer

	the case, the Information Governance Team will be asked to review the processing of personal data affected and the associated documentation has been/will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment.	
Equalities	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under Equality Act 2010. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Equality Act 2010. We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore, we will complete a separate equalities impact assessments at project level.	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Housing & Inclusion Team Leader
Crime and Disorder	No impact identified	Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Procurement	We are committed to deliver inclusive services in accordance with the Council's values.	Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Biodiversity and Climate Change	There are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council's Equalities Policy outlines its responsibilities under the Equalities Act 2010 and as part of its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Act, the Council must report annually on progress made. The Council has a duty to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct.
- Advance equality of opportunity.
- Foster good relations between people

2.2 The Policy sets out the Council's three agreed objectives:

- **Community Leader** – To lead by example, to ensure every individual resident is connected and supported
- **Employer** – To lead a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the borough of Maidstone where residents and colleagues feel safe, confident and empowered to challenge and bring about change
- **Service Provider**– To deliver inclusive services in accordance with the Council's values.

2.3 An action plan is in place to deliver these objectives. This action plan is reviewed and refreshed on an annual basis to ensure that Council's services are accessible and continue to meet the needs of its residents.

2.4 Equalities is engrained within the organisation from its organisational values through to its staff appraisal process. At a strategic level, the direction is set by the Strategic Plan and the Council's priorities.

2.5 The action plan is informed by service led insight. It is reflective of current workstreams. The action plan is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer group.

2.6 To fulfil its Public Sector Equality duty and demonstrate due regard in the carrying out of its functions, the Council has an Equalities Impact Assessment process in place. At the start of a project, officers evaluate the impact a decision 'could have' on the 9 Protected Characteristics. If there was a negative impact on one or more of the 9 groups or characteristics protected under the act, mitigations would be put in place.

Progress update on Objectives and Action Plan

2.7 Progress on the current actions is included at Appendix 1. The existing Action Plan was agreed during the pandemic and reflected the action that was required in response to this, recognising the disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups in the community. No significant changes were made last year as it was felt more progress could be made against the existing actions.

2.8 Many of the actions have been completed have become established workstreams such as the Rough Sleepers Initiative which has funding until March 2023. It is hoped that this service will receive mainstream funding from April 2023 from the Clinical Commissioning Group, to continue the work across West Kent.

2.9 An audit of historical assets within the borough of Maidstone was undertaken. Museum collections were appraised, and work was undertaken with donors to understand the links to the past. It was found that there were no connections with slave owning families. It was also identified that

the Museum's world collection did not include 'lived experience'. A community panel is being put together to undertake work to support this need.

2.10 Public Engagement was limited during the pandemic, and it was identified that new innovations were needed to reach the wider community. The Resident Survey 2022 was launched on the Council's new engagement platform 'Lets Talk Maidstone' in July 2022. A total of 5027 people responded to the questionnaire and the results from the Survey have already been used to inform a number of workstreams, from initiatives to support communities affected by the cost-of-living crisis to the Town Centre Strategy. Since its launch 'Let's Talk Maidstone' has been used to deliver the following Consultation and Engagement activities:

- Operation Brock
- Mote Park Arts
- Scarecrow Festival
- Marden Task Force
- Waste and Recycling
- Community Governance Review
- Budget Survey
- Community Wi-Fi
- Innovation centre Research & development event
- Let's Talk Design & Sustainability
- Maidstone Air Quality 2022

2.11 The Council's ability to support the community since the pandemic has grown in strength. The directory of Voluntary and Community (VCS) Groups is a valued resource utilised across the Council. It ensures a more consistent and coordinated approach to communicating, information, advice and support. A regular news email is sent to all organisations on the directory, so we are able to get immediate information out as broadly as possible. This has been incredibly helpful on projects such as the Help for Ukraine scheme and as part of ongoing work with the cost-of-living crisis. Places of Worship and Faith groups have now been mapped and included in the directory which increases access to services and support.

2.12 Twenty organisations were funded from the first phase of the Community Resilience Fund amounting to £58,429.00. The funding has supported a wide variety of activities from a diverse group of organisations. Organisations have been able to continue to provide or increase their ability to meet demand by providing activities and support ranging from counselling sessions and mental health support to outdoor activities to support wellbeing.

2.13 The second phase of the Community Resilience Fund has been launched and applications are due to close on 16 December 2022 to enable funds to be distributed as quickly as possible so that support can be provided during the most challenging winter months. The remit of the fund has been broadened to include projects supporting residents with food and bills.

2.14 In partnership with Funding for All, the Council hosted a 'Volunteering & Funding Advice Event' on 30 November at Trinity House. The event was for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) supporting people in the borough of Maidstone. Funding support and advice was offered to attendees as well as the chance to explore opportunities for volunteer engagement. Delegates were provided with the opportunity to meet funders and have 1:1s with funding advisors. There was also a marketplace where groups could connect with and seek support from a range of VCSEs and support organisations. A final plenary session helped identify the types of support needed going forward. This feedback is being collated to shape and determine the type of support we offer going forward.

Actions where progress was limited

2.15 The Compassionate Borough Status Project was not taken forward due to competing priorities for the Heart of Kent Hospice. However, the Compassionate Maidstone Award are now well established, and ran for the 3rd time in November 2022.

2.16 An assessment to evaluate the Council as an Inclusive Employer was not undertaken. This will instead be a focus of the HR Culture Change Project.

The Equalities Policy (2017-2021)

2.17 The Council has legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010 to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between people.

Our Policy document sets out these responsibilities to the public. It is important that this document is up to date and accessible if it is to be fit for purpose.

2.18 The Policy was last updated in 2017. Since that date, there have been no legislative changes to warrant an update until very recently. The Council's Equalities objectives are set out in the document and also delivered as part of a stand-alone action plan which has been refreshed annually. It is recommended that the Policy be renamed and brought in line with the current, recognised terminology used and called the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. In 2018 the Council took the decision to include the Armed Forces in its Equalities Action plan as a means of ensuring that this community in Maidstone was recognised. The enshrinement of the Covenant into law is an opportunity to build upon work councils are already leading to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families to have the same equality of access to public services as their civilian neighbours.

2.19 Community Covenants are a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community.

Maidstone Borough Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in October 2012.

- 2.20 In 2018 the Council took the decision to include its work with the Armed Forces Community in its Equalities Action plan. The enshrinement of the Covenant into law is an opportunity to build upon work councils are already leading to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families to have the same equality of access to public services as their civilian neighbours.
- 2.21 The Armed Forces Covenant has recently become law (Armed Forces Act 2021). The Armed Forces Covenant's enshrinement into law is an opportunity to build upon work councils are already leading to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families to have the same equality of access to public services as their civilian neighbours. Therefore, the policy has been updated to reference the Armed Forces Act 2021 and the Council's responsibilities in terms of demonstrating 'due regard'.

Development of revised Action Plan

- 2.22 The action plan for 2022/23 has been developed with the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer group. The group was established as part of the existing action plan (2020/21) to monitor the progress of the action plan. Services represented include HR Learning and Development, Housing, Museums, Communication and Engagement, Democratic Services and Elections, Mayoralty, Revenues and Benefits (Welfare team) and Policy, Communities and Engagement.
- 2.23 This officer group have been able to share their extensive learning and experience in terms of service needs and provide valuable insight to identify where barriers or gaps are negatively impacting particular groups.
- 2.24 They are also in a position to evaluate their own needs as employees of a public sector organisation and identify the support that is required for the workforce.
- 2.25 Staff identified a number of gaps including:
- Existing, new and emerging communities present a challenge for staff in terms of engaging with and being able to understand needs
 - Digital Exclusion – support needed to access services online
 - Making the most of 'neutral spaces' i.e. places where the Council has a presence such as the Museum, Trinity House or when a one service is delivering outreach support, that it looks to include a wider range of service to better support residents and increase access to services. For example, the recent cost of living events, Ukraine Welcome event and Community Protection surgeries.
- 2.26 In terms of staff training and support the following issues were identified:
- Organisational diversity is not fully representative of community
 - Leadership and elected members are not representative of the community.
 - There are no forums at staff level to discuss EDI

- There is a need to feel more comfortable about diversity in the workplace
- There is a lack of awareness of cultural barriers affecting access to services
- There is a lack of understanding of disability, hidden disabilities (neurodivergent), mental health, physical, complex social and learning difficulties
- There is a lack of understanding about barriers to employee accessibility to services and internal processes
- There are no quiet areas in office, which means the environment is not for suitable neurodivergent.

2.27 There is a great deal to build on in terms of what is happening across the organisation such as the Staff Engagement Group, new consultation and engagement tools, the Culture Change project, One View project, the development and strengthening of relationships within the VCS and Digital and Financial Inclusion workstreams.

2.28 However, there is also an opportunity to be more detailed and specific in the actions we take going forward. This can be achieved through the increased use of data (Census data sets from November onwards), through staff (and member) training in cultural competencies and the ongoing culture change project.

2.29 The draft action plan can be found at appendix 3. Some of the key recommendations are summarised below:

- To respond to concerns from the EDI staff group for a need to feel more comfortable about diversity in the workplace, it is therefore proposed that we create equalities champions. They would be an informal point of contact, to listen and to identify possible next steps or further help.
- The EDI staff group also considered employee accessibility to services and internal processes. It was that barriers existed and in terms of how this. It is also proposed that we start proactively asking specific questions of staff, through staff consultation and engagement to broaden our organisational understanding of the diversity that exists in our workforce and what issues and ideas exist that can contribute positively to our way forward.
- There is a need to be specific when discussing the communities the Council support. It was felt that this could only be achieved when staff were provided with training and felt empowered to use appropriate language. It was identified that data and insight was vital in understand who our communities were. The adoption of the LGA Inclusive Language guide has been put forward as a recommended action, underpinned by the need for detailed and informed evidence bases for decision making. Therefore, only accepting the use of specific language when referring to diverse communities in reports for decision. Other complementary actions detailed include:

- Cultural competency training
- Work on census data to identify emerging needs

Recommended Inclusion of additional protected characteristic

2.30 The Equality Act 2010 states that it is illegal to discriminate against someone for any of the following reasons:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Marriage and civil partnership
5. Pregnancy and maternity
6. Race
7. Religion or belief
8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

2.31 A number of Councils across the Country have taken the decision to include 'socio-economical' factors as an additional protected characteristic. These include Haringey, Manchester as well as Welsh Councils.

2.32 The cost-of-living crisis is expected to have a significant impact on some groups of people in Maidstone than others. This is likely to include people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act, including women, disabled people, people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, and both older and younger people. People with caring responsibilities are also likely to be disproportionately impacted as their income tends to be lower than the population as a whole.

2.33 We want to ensure that our decision making does not impact a group or individual who are already in a financially vulnerable financial situation, and we want this to be understood in simple, straightforward term. Therefore, it is recommended that we include Poverty (as opposed to socio-economic factors) as an additional 'local characteristic' to encourage officers and decision makers to consider the impact of changes to Policy or service delivery and to take mitigating action. It is important note that everyone in our community has a protected characteristic – age and gender for example, so in adding Poverty as an additional characteristic we are creating a universal consideration in terms of impact.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 To consider the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update and the proposed revisions to the Policy and action plan, recommending that the changes be made.

- 3.2 To consider the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update and the proposed changes to the Equalities Policy and action plan, recommending that no further changes be made to the Policy and action plan.
- 3.3 To consider the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update and the proposed revisions to the Policy and action plan make additional amendments and recommendations to the Executive.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 As detailed at 3.1 of the report. The update on the Equalities Objectives and action plan shows the progress made against existing actions.
- 4.2 These actions have been in place since 2020 (in response to the pandemic) and there is a need to refresh the actions so that the Council can continue to make progress against its objectives.
- 4.3 The Policy is an overarching document, outlining the Council's legislative responsibilities. However, the Armed Forces Covenant has become enshrined in law, and it is important that this is recognised in the Policy to demonstrate the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting its Armed Forces Community.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The Council's responsibilities as a Public Sector Authority are set out in the Equality Act 2010. The Annual Update report provides an opportunity for the Council to review its progress against its objectives and ensure they are still fit for purpose. Not taking this opportunity to review progress and respond to the needs of its staff and residents could cause reputational damage to the Council and we would not be fulfilling our responsibilities under the Act.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 None
-

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The Executive will be considering the matter on 25 January 2023.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Equalities Action Plan Update

- Appendix 2: Equalities Policy
- Appendix 3: Refreshed Action Plan

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

As a Community Leader
Objective
To lead by example, to ensure every individual resident is connected and supported.

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Agreed Actions	Progress – 2022	Status
<p>We will work with the Heart of Kent Hospice, Kent County Council, local businesses, community and faith groups to achieve Compassionate Borough Status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work was paused due to HoK’s responsibilities to patients during pandemic. • Officers from Policy, Communities and Engagement team and Communication and Marketing team have continued to support HoK on establishing a way forward but no concrete plans have come forward to date • The Compassion Maidstone Awards which MBC delivers with HoK and other partners took place for as third year in November 2022. 	<p>Should the Compassion Borough Status project be taken forward by HoK in the future, it will be supported by the same teams and an update would be included in a future action plan in support of the delivery of this objective.</p> <p>Incomplete/cannot be carried forward</p>
<p>We will take an evidence-based approach to leading recovery in Maidstone including a specific work stream on communities.</p>	<p>The data analytics team have 9 completed dashboards as part of its support for recovery and renewal projects with a further four under review and another 7 under development.</p> <p>The team remain on target to achieve 18 by summer 2023.</p> <p>The team have improved the information published on the website, with dashboards accessible here.</p>	<p>Complete/on schedule to deliver</p>
<p>We will seek to build on the relationships we have developed with our communities as a result</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repository of Community Groups been developed and is currently being made publicly available via 	<p>Ongoing/remain included in action plan</p>

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<p>of the recent pandemic. We will communicate, engage with, and disseminate information to support and engage our wider communities including through the local Parish Councils and voluntary groups.</p>	<p>website with the provision for new groups to sign up in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monthly newsletters produced and sent to Parishes and Ward Councillors.• Inboxes and single point of contact set up for Parishes and Community Groups.• A new inbox was set up in response to the Ukraine crisis management by the Policy, Community and Engagement team as well as support pages on the website• Proactive engagement was undertaken with VCS groups regarding the Ukraine and support provided.• Community pages developed to include support, cost of living information, volunteering, funding etc• 20 organisations were funded from the 1st phase of the Community Resilience Fund amounting to £58, 429.00. The funding will support a wide variety of activities from a diverse group of organisations including, Hi Kent, Maidstone Street Pastors, Fusion healthy living and Rubicon Cares. Organisations will be able to continue to provide or increase their ability to meet demand by providing activities and support ranging from counselling sessions and mental health support to outdoor activities to support wellbeing.• The 2nd phase of the Community Resilience Fund is due to be launched in November 2022.• In partnership with Funding for All, the Council is hosting a 'Volunteering & Funding Advice Event' on 30 November at Trinity House. This event is for volunteers and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) supporting people in the borough of Maidstone. It will offer funding support	
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	<p>and explore opportunities for volunteer engagement. Training will be delivered on volunteering and diversifying funding sources. There will be opportunities to meet funders and have 1:1s with funding advisors. There will also be a marketplace where groups can connect with and seek support from a range of VCSEs and support organisations. It is hoped that this will be the first of a series of events, developed with the sector to respond to its need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC represented on Informal District Council VCS Forum established in November 2021. MBC Consultation team supporting team on district mapping exercise of local forums and bodies to understand the offer across Kent. The terms of reference for the formalised group have now been formalised and MBC will be represented by the Insight, Communities and Governance Manager. 	
<p>We will undertake a review of consultation and engagement activities to ensure that they maximise resident participation and are representative of Maidstone’s demographic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement activities have been limited due to the pandemic. • Opportunities have been maximised through joined up working between the Consultation and Comms and Marketing teams. • Social Media, Posters, Leaflets and the use of QR codes have been maximised to reach a wider audience. • Under 35 age group identified as a group where engagement is low. • New Consultation and engagement software is trialled, offering more varied and accessible opportunities to maximise participation. 	<p>Ongoing/remain included in action plan</p>

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	<p>Equalities Officer Group will be utilised to identify gaps and maximise opportunities and identify areas of focus.</p>	<p>• _____</p>
<p>We will appoint an internal Equalities Group to lead and provide join-up across Council services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities Officer Group formed and meets on a quarterly basis. 	<p>Complete</p>
<p>We will support and promote diversity and inclusion in the borough through our communications and events – with a focus on our seldom-heard communities.</p>	<p>The Communication team have focused promotion and support across all groups:</p> <p>Age/Sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Menopause Day - October <p>Disability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Macmillan Big Coffee Morning - September • MBC Website accessibility <p>Sexual Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT - June <p>Race:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black History Month - October • Lunar New Year - February • Ukrainian Refugee Support <p>Sex:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Violence against Women and Girls - Safer Streets • White Ribbon Stand Up against Domestic Violence <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising Cost of Living Support Events • Compassionate Community Awards - October • The Knife Angel – September <p>Museum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timescales demanded by members for the Archaeology Gallery project did not allow for regular public engagement and so no panel has been convened. It is hoped that we will still be able to consult on ideas and designs, but this will inevitably be on an ad hoc basis. 	<p>Ongoing/remain included in action plan</p>

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	The communications team works in partnership with the Consultation team on new consultation to ensure they are promoted and responses monitored so targeted work can be undertaken.	
We will audit and appraise historical assets within the borough of Maidstone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum collections was appraised and work undertaken with donors to understand the links to the past. There are no connections with slave owning families. • It was identified that the Museum’s world collection does not include ‘lived experience’. Work will be undertaken with communities to reflect this. • A Community Panel in place to advise on exhibitions from the perspective of minority groups in place 	Complete
We will support our serving and veteran communities through our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant with training/guidance provided to staff across all services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces Member Champion appointed for 2022 • Proactive engagement with local Armed Forces community undertaken to promote employment vacancies at MBC • Local Armed Forces contacts are included as part of VCS Repository to ensure important information and support is reaching this community such as cost of living website pages. 	Ongoing/remain included in action plan

As an Employer
Objective
To lead a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the borough of Maidstone where residents and colleagues feel safe, confident, and empowered to challenge and bring about change.

Agreed Actions	Progress 2022	Status
<p>We will undertake a regular Staff Survey so that the organisation can identify where it needs to change and adapt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Survey undertaken and repeated every 2 years • Staff Engagement Group in place • Potential for future EDI survey to inform what EDI training is needed 	<p>Complete.</p>
<p>We will undertake a self-assessment as an Inclusive Employer.</p>	<p>External schemes have been reviewed by HR and Policy teams. This has not been taken forward. Other programmes of work have taken priority and may lead to an alternative approach such as the Culture Change project.</p>	<p>Alternative programmes of work have taken priority and may lead to an alternative approach such as the Culture Change project</p> <p>Incomplete</p> <p>To be picked new action plan as action relating to Culture Change project</p>
<p>We will look after the mental health of our staff and recognise when this offer needs to change.</p>	<p>There are currently 14 Mental Health first aiders. Minimal use of Mental Health First Aiders by staff being recorded.</p> <p>There is more training planned to equip staff dealing with customer’s Mental Health (MH) rather than inhouse issues.</p> <p>Additionally, Wellbeing week takes place on annual basis for all staff. Mental Health webinars run by Employee Assistance programme Care First. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MH -Kindness • MH -Awareness • Men’s health • Menopause <p>Online assistance also remains in place</p>	<p>Ongoing/remain included in action plan</p>

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<p>We will provide training and support to staff so they can recognise and manage unacceptable behaviours.</p>	<p>A HR Team Talk 'A respectful workplace for all' was delivered by Managers.</p> <p>Budget is available for EDI Training. Also available Learning disability training and Equality in the workplace</p> <p>All staff are currently required to complete Equalities Act 2010 learning.</p> <p>The EDI Officer group considered training needs as part of its development of the new Action Plan</p>	<p>EDI officer group has recommended areas of focus for training and development as part of the Equalities Action plan.</p> <p>Ongoing/training included in new action plan with focus on cultural competencies and champion roles</p>
<p>We will enable staff to understand and respond to the mental health needs of residents, particularly after challenging life events.</p>	<p>Two courses are run for customer facing staff to deal with MH issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health run by MIND • Mental Capacity Act 	<p>Complete Focus on training included in new action plan</p>

As a Service Provider
Objective
To deliver inclusive services in accordance with Council’s values.

Agreed Actions	Progress 2022	Status
<p>We will review and identify our policies where we consider Equalities impacts and identify how we can improve outcomes through revisions to policy.</p>	<p>All Council Strategies and Policies have been mapped and those with equalities impacts identified.</p>	<p>To proactively work with service areas as polices are due for review to ensure Equalities Impacts have been considered.</p> <p>Ongoing – to pick up in new action plan</p>
<p>We will appoint an Equalities Group to lead and provide join-up across Council services.</p>	<p>The Equalities Officer Group meets on a quarterly basis. It has been renamed to the EDI Officer group to reflect its wider remit. Primarily it is responsible for managing the Equalities Action Plan.</p> <p>The Group’s membership was extended to include a wider group. It now has membership from HR Learning and Development, Housing, Museums, Communication and Engagement, Democratic Services and Elections, Mayoralty, Revenues and Benefits (Welfare team) and Policy, Communities and Engagement. The group have been able to share their extensive learning and experience in terms of service needs and provide valuable insight to identify where barriers or gaps are negatively impacting particular groups.</p> <p>It has developed the actions to deliver the Council’s Equalities Objectives for 2022 onwards</p>	<p>To continue to monitor and lead the equalities action plan</p> <p>Complete</p>

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<p>We will work with the community through consultation processes, increasing our offer of focus group and participatory methods to increase engagement with seldom-heard groups.</p>	<p>'Let's Talk Maidstone' (an online consultation and engagement platform) was rolled out in July 2022, launching the Resident Survey.</p> <p>The platform allows residents to engage in different ways such as quick polls or providing qualitative information via 'stories' and comment tools. Background information can be included on the 'project' page such as FAQs which help inform visitors to the platform on the purpose of the consultation.</p> <p>The Resident survey closed at the end of September. A total of 5027 people responded to the questionnaire, of which 3584 provided age and gender allowing these responses to be weighted in line with the population of Maidstone.</p> <p>Since its launch in July the platform has been used to deliver the following Consultation and Engagement activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation Broc • Mote Park Arts • Scarecrow Festival • Marden Task Force • Waste and Recycling • Community Governance Review • Budget Survey • Community Wi-Fi <p>Two engagement 'hubs' have been developed on the platform – 1 for Economic Development and 1 for Planning. Economic Development are utilising 'Let's Talk Maidstone' to help develop an upcoming Innovation Centre Research and Development event with the Business Community.</p>	<p>We continue to develop this offer which supports services across the Council.</p> <p>Ongoing – included in new action plan</p>
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	A Planning Hub has been launched for the 'Sustainability and Design Mapping exercise'. This seeks to find out resident views on features and characteristics of the borough.	
We will work collaboratively with the Museum and its programme of events to promote diversity and inclusion and strengthen ties to seldom-heard communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Panel Established • The museum continues to be committed to addressing EDI in its work and the new gallery will be designed with the assistance of individuals with as many kinds of lived experience as possible. 	Complete
We will undertake a Councillor-led Access to Services Review which will assess: Digital Inclusion and website accessibility, Enabling communication, Our buildings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members completed a series of meetings gathering evidence from internal officers as well as external organisation. Due to the limitations of the pandemic the review focused mainly on Digital Inclusion and accessibility. • Actionable recommendations were made at the conclusion of each session primarily to support digital accessibility and were picked up by the Digital Strategy workstreams. • A review of the Community Group Repository was also completed. The repository was developed extensively, and a proactive approach was taken to mapping groups in the Voluntary Community Sector supporting Maidstone residents. This repository now also includes many Faith Groups and Places of Worship. • The repository is currently being developed for public access on the Council's Community webpages 	<p>Complete</p> <p>A watching brief to be maintained and issues reported to the Policy, Communities and Engagement team -</p>
We will work in partnership to deliver the Rough Sleeping initiative delivery plan to provide mental health outreach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team has been in situ since September 2020. Approximately 360 clients have been supported/are still being supported by the initiative. • Housing will continue to work in partnership with KMPT, to provide mental health support to rough sleepers, and those at risk of rough sleeping. It has funding until March 2023 and it is hoped that this service will receive mainstream funding from April 2023 from the CCG, to continue the work across West Kent. 	Complete

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<p>We will review the Equalities Impact Assessment processes.</p>	<p>The Armed Forces Covenant was a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces Community, intended to complement at a local level. Maidstone signed the Covenant in 2012. In 2018 it was recognised that the work being done with the Armed Forces community in Maidstone should be included in the Equalities Action Plan.</p> <p>Changes to the EqIA were originally proposed in 2019/20 to reflect forthcoming legislative changes to responsibilities in Armed Forces Bill 2021-22. However, the bill was delayed.</p> <p>Training and guidance were provided to Armed Forces Champions in November 2022.</p> <p>It is proposed that this legislative changes i.e. the Armed Forces Covenant being enshrined in law should be reflected and noted in the EDI Policy.</p> <p>Additionally, the cost-of-living crisis is likely to have a more significant impact on some groups of people in Maidstone than others. This is likely to include people who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act, including women, disabled people, people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds, and both older and younger people. People with caring responsibilities are also likely to be disproportionately impacted as their income tends to be lower than the population as a whole.</p> <p>It is proposed that this be addressed by introducing a local protected characteristic as part of the EqIA process - 'Poverty'.</p>	<p>Ongoing The reference to the Armed Forces Act should be included as a light touch change to the existing policy.</p> <p>Poverty should be included as a local protected characteristic to ensure no resident is left behind as part of decision making and that vulnerable residents are not adversely affected</p>
<p>We will develop processes to ensure Social Value is a core consideration of our decision making.</p>	<p>The Procurement Strategy and processes are being revised to include Social Value. A proposal was taken to WLT in November 2022. Subject to approval, Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 – <i>Social Value</i> will form part of the procurement evaluation. As part of that process the following will be considered:</p>	<p>Complete</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• how what is proposed to be procured might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area, and• how, in conducting the process of procurement, it might act with a view to securing that improvement. <p>In practice this will involve the tender process introducing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• around 10% of the contract evaluation to be assessed against social values.	
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**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
2022-2025**

*Working towards greater equality in
Maidstone*

Public Sector equality duty

Rights and Responsibilities

As a public authority the Council has responsibilities and a duty to fulfil for both its residents and staff. This was introduced in the Equality Act 2010 which replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act; simplifying the law, removing inconsistencies, making it easier to understand and comply with. It also strengthened the laws to help tackle inequality and discrimination.

The Equality Duty applies to public bodies which includes the Council and other organisations carrying out public functions.

It supports good-decision making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected, helping them to deliver policies and services that are efficient, effective and accessible to all by meeting different types of people's needs.

The duty applies to nine 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

What the Council must do to fulfil this duty is:

- Publish information to show compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually.

The information published must show due regard to:

Eliminating unlawful discrimination harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act

Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not share it

Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

- Set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years. These should be specific and measurable.

By publishing relevant equality information to demonstrate transparent decision making processes the Council becomes accountable to its service users. This in turns provides the public with the information they need to hold it to account, should they need to, for its performance on equality.

Armed Force Act 2021

All councils have voluntarily signed the Armed Forces Covenant. The further enshrinement of the Covenant into law is an opportunity to build upon work councils are already leading to help serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families to have the same equality of access to public services as their civilian neighbours. This includes the areas of focus in the Act – housing, education and healthcare. Councils play a key role in the provision or commissioning of these services with partners and joining-up support around the needs of an individual and their family.

Our Armed Forces Community is included in our consideration of equalities impacts as part of decision making.

Policy Statement

Maidstone is the County Town of Kent, a historic market town with a rich and diverse history. It is constantly changing and evolving. What remains important as Maidstone changes and grows is that residents have a sense of belonging and community in order to prosper.

As a council we want to know our residents, we want to ensure that we are meeting their needs by offering opportunity and access to services through a conscious awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues.

Our commitment to achieving this is outlined in the standards and actions set out in this document. These apply to staff, councillors and to those who deliver services on our behalf.

Maidstone Borough Council's [Strategic Plan 2019-2045](#) sets the Council's strategic vision for the borough of Maidstone. It outlines the council's priorities and informs on its values. Equalities are firmly ingrained in the council's values. This document helps determine not only the decisions made by the officers and elected members but it also advocates our approach to day to day business and conduct, and the way we treat our customers and each other.

Services
Everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.

Teamwork
Working together to achieve our objectives and goals in a way that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone in our organisation.

Responsibility
We work in an environment that encourages us to take ownership for our actions. Making the right choices and decisions that lead to a satisfactory outcome for all.

Integrity
We have the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty. We work with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in everything we do.

Value
Taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

Equality
Valuing our differences and understanding how they can contribute to a better working environment and services that are fair and easy to access

We will deliver on our commitment to equalities by setting an organisational standard through clear objectives for each of the three important **roles and responsibilities** we have as a council:

Role 1: As a Community Leader: We will engage with residents in an open and meaningful way.

Role 2: As a Service Provider: We will ensure our services are inclusive, accessible and support residents and customers.

Role 3: As an employer: To have a workforce that feels valued and respected.

(Draft) Equality Objectives and Action Plan 2022-2025

As a Community Leader			
Objective			
To lead by example, to ensure every individual resident is connected and supported.			
Commitments	Actions	Responsibility	Timeframe
<p>We will work closely with our partners (Voluntary and Community Sector, Anchor Institutions, Parishes and Church and Faith groups) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities for joined up working and improving our ability to share information to support and engage our wider communities Increase volunteering opportunities and participation, funding and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create join up with Housing Associations to deliver hardship payments as part of the Xantura project Implement no wrong door (local campaign to signpost to services) – increasing access to services Provide access to digital training and support at Trinity House. 	<p>Housing/Revs and Bens</p> <p>All teams (led by Inclusion board)</p> <p>Housing Communities, Policy & Engagement team</p>	<p>April 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>Review Jan 2023</p>
<p>We will undertake a review of consultation and engagement activities to ensure that they maximise resident participation and are representative of Maidstone’s demographic.</p>	<p>Increase response rates from underrepresented groups through us of Let’s Talk Maidstone (the Council’s new public engagement platform)</p>	<p>Communities, Policy & Engagement team</p>	<p>Review Jan 2023</p>
<p>We will support and promote diversity and inclusion in the borough through our communications and</p>	<p>Expand internal Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group</p>	<p>Communities, Policy & Engagement team</p>	<p>Jan 2023</p>

events – with a focus on our seldom-heard communities.	to provide internal direction and challenge Create Diversity Calendar - Annual calendar of events to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion in Maidstone	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer Group	March 2023
We will support our serving and veteran communities through our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant and responsibilities under the Armed Forces Act 2021 with guidance provided to staff across all services.	Provide guidance to enable all staff to support Armed Forces Community	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	March 2023
Connections to other plans			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan • Communications Plan • Recovery and Renewal Strategy • Financial Inclusion Strategy 			

As an Employer			
Objective			
To lead a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the borough of Maidstone where residents and colleagues feel safe, confident, and empowered to challenge and bring about change.			
Commitments	Actions	Responsibility	Timescale
We will train our staff so that they are skilled in inclusive practice, to work with communities who are	Provide Staff training in Cultural Competencies	HR	Review Jan 2023

less able, or willing, to participate in life in their local neighbourhoods. We will provide training and support to staff so they can recognise and manage unacceptable behaviours	Introduce Equalities Champions (including elected member and senior leadership) Deliver the Culture change project	Policy Communities & Engagement team HR	April 2023 Ongoing
We will creating a strong, internal sense of community within the organisation.	Introduce Annual staff EDI survey to identify need and benchmark progress	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	Jan 2023
We will look after the mental health of our staff and recognise when this offer needs to change	Provide training and support for Mental Health Champions	HR	Ongoing
Connections to other plans			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan • Workforce Strategy 			

As a Service Provider			
Objective			
To deliver inclusive services in accordance with Council's values.			
Commitments	Actions	Responsibility	Timescale
We will use specific and meaningful language when referring to diverse communities	Adopt of LGA Inclusive Language Guide	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	April 2023

We will support access to services and support through ICT process, communication and join up with partners	Proactively use 'neutral spaces' to increase access to support and services for residents	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer Group All Services	Review Jan 2023
We will take an evidence-based approach to leading recovery in Maidstone including a specific work stream on communities.	Identify emerging needs from Census data	Data Analytics team	Dec 2023 (ongoing release)
We will review the Equalities Impact Assessment processes.	Include 'Poverty' as a local protected characteristic with the EqIA process	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	Jan 2023
We will review and identify our policies where we consider equalities impacts and identify how we can improve outcomes through revisions to policy.	Include Armed Forces Act 2021 in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	Dec 2022
	Prioritise existing Policies by review date and implement process of review for equalities.	Policy, Communities & Engagement team	Review Feb 2023
Connections to other plans			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan • Recovery & Renewal Strategy • Digital Strategy 			

Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

17 January 2023

Strategic Plan Refresh 2023-28

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Economic Regeneration and Leisure PAC	10 January 2023
Planning and Infrastructure PAC	11 January 2023
Communities, Housing and Environment PAC	17 January 2023
Corporate Services PAC	18 January 2023
Executive	8 February 2023
Council	22 February 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report proposes refreshed areas of focus for the Council’s Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028.

Committee are asked to consider the changes and recommend any amendments to the Executive for consideration.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Committee consider the proposed refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028, set out in Appendix A, and recommend that they be approved by the Executive subject to any suggested amendments.

Strategic Plan Refresh 2023-28

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>This report considers the proposed areas of focus for the Strategic Priorities for the next five years and identifies action for progressing the shaping of the areas of focus for 2023-2028.</p>	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>Consideration has been given to the crosscutting objectives in formulating the proposed areas of focus for the Strategic Plan</p>	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Risk Management	The Council's corporate risk strategy includes strategic risks associated with the Strategic Plan.	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Financial	The Strategic Plan sets the Council's Priorities and the direction for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Insight Communities and

		Governance Manager
Legal	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Council's Strategic Plan demonstrates compliance with this duty. This review of the Council's priorities within the Strategic Plan will enable the Council to deliver services in an efficient and effective manner which meets the needs of the borough and aspirations of local inhabitants and stakeholders.</p> <p>In reviewing the priorities, the Council is obliged to ensure that its financial obligations are adhered to. The Council has a legal duty to set a balanced budget and continue to monitor the budget during the course of each municipal year and take remedial action if at any time.</p>	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes. If as a result of the update to the milestones and the emerging MTFs for 2023-2028 changes are required to services involving personal data, then Data Protection Impact Assessments will be undertaken.	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. If as a result of the update to the milestones and the emerging MTFs for 2023-2028 changes are required to services involving personal data, then an Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken.	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Public Health	One of the Council's cross cutting objectives is that Health Inequalities are addressed and reduced. The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an impact assessment. If as a result of the update to the milestones and the	Public Health Officer

	emerging MTFS for 2023-2028 changes are required to services involving personal data, then Data Protection Impact Assessments will be undertaken.	
Crime and Disorder	The recommendations include proposals for amendments to the areas of focus under Safe Clean and Green.	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Procurement	No implications	Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The recommendations includes proposals for amendments to the areas of focus under Safe Clean and Green	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Strategic Plan was adopted in December 2018 and covers the period until 2045. The decision was taken for it to be a 26-year plan to ensure continuity, and a basis on which all other Maidstone Borough Council plans and strategies could be developed. The Strategic Plan was developed involving a wide cross section of Councillors, staff and other stakeholders before being adopted in December of that year. The vision and priorities are clear and remain relevant.
- 2.2 The areas of focus were last refreshed in 2021 to respond to the significant impact of the pandemic and to plan the Council's approach to the recovery.
- 2.3 In July the Executive approved a recommendation that the Strategic Plan 2019-45 milestones be refreshed for 2023-28. The Council's Wider Leadership Team reviewed the existing areas of focus at an away day and the proposals were discussed and amended by the Executive.
- 2.4 This report proposes refreshed areas of focus for 2023-2028 consistent with the Council's Vision and four priorities; it reflects both the long-term ambitions of the Council whilst also responding to the current national and local environment including recovery from the pandemic, increased housing need, financial insecurity and the climate crisis.
- 2.5 The revised areas of focus proposed can be seen at Appendix A. Column A shows the existing milestones and Column B shows the proposed milestones. An overview of the changes and the purpose are outlined below under each priority heading.

Embracing Growth Enabling Infrastructure.

- 2.6 Minimal changes have been made under this priority but some amendments have been made to language to show emphasis and to reflect progress on the local plan, and the importance of engagement.

Safe Clean and Green

- 2.7 There is a broadening of the action on parks and public spaces, to reflect not only enforcement activities but also promotion of these spaces.
- 2.8 Language has been changed on milestones on community safety and cleanliness to make them stronger, and on Climate Change and Biodiversity to demonstrate that Council activity goes beyond the action plan.
- 2.9 An additional action has been included to reflect the work and investment being made in the service and to reflect the need to meet the requirements of all new government legislation.

A Thriving Place

- 2.10 On initial sight it may appear there has been substantial change under this priority. However, many of the changes have been combined to demonstrate focus.
- 2.11 The area of focus on community resilience and to encourage pride in our borough has been merged under homes and communities.
- 2.12 Existing actions on Maidstone East and the opportunity sites have been merged and a new milestone created to reflect the large programme of work and significant investment being made in the town centre.

Homes and Communities

- 2.13 Two new actions have been added. The first has been added to reflect the Council's commitment to support residents and reflect the current financial crisis. The second is the commitment to deliver 1,000 affordable homes.
- 2.14 Some changes have been made to the language on the milestone for rough sleeping to reflect the proactive and innovative actions taken by the council.
- 2.15 There is a change of emphasis on the milestone on temporary accommodation from reduction in use to increase in supply. Whilst the use of temporary accommodation is not desirable the change in emphasis reflects the current climate of financial insecurity which has resulted in an increased demand which the Council is required to support. The new milestone reflects that the Council will meet this demand but do so by investing in accommodation.
- 2.16 The specific action on working with the Integrated Care Partnership has been removed as it is felt that this is covered under the action working in partnership for community resilience.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Strategic Plan was adopted in December 2018 and covers the period until 2045. It was developed involving a wide cross section of Councillors, staff and other stakeholders. The vision and priorities are clear and remain relevant. The proposed refresh to the areas of focus for the next 5 years has been set out in Appendix A.
 - 3.2 The Committee could recommend the amendments as set out in the final column of the table, or they could recommend amending the wording, adding or deleting areas of focus.
 - 3.3 Members could recommend retaining the current areas of focus as they were when they were last updated in 2021. However, those areas of focus reflected the current environment and immediate recovery from the pandemic.
-

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Committee is recommended to consider the new areas of focus as presented at Appendix A and recommend that they be approved by the Executive subject to any suggested amendments. The Council is now facing fresh challenges and opportunities and the proposed areas of focus reflect these developments
-

5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework.
-

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Key officers and the Executive have been consulted in the development of these areas of focus at independent away days.
-

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The approved refreshed areas of focus will be submitted to Council for approval as the Strategic Plan is a budget and policy framework document.
 - 7.2 Once approved the new areas of focus will be shared with all Officers to ensure the delivery of the Council's priorities. The refreshed Strategic Plan will be made available on the Council's website.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Strategic Plan Proposed Areas of Focus 2023-28
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Strategic Plan 2019-2045 -

https://maidstone.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/269721/Strategic-Plan2019.pdf

Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure		
Ref	A -Current Areas of Focus (2021-26)	B- Proposed Areas of Focus (2023-28)
1.1	Engaging with our communities on the Local Plan Review	Undertake engagement throughout the continuous process of the local plan development
1.2	The Council will take a proactive role in creating and consider investing in new places	The Council will take a proactive role in creating and consider investing in new places
1.3	Working with partners to get infrastructure planned, funded and delivered	Working with partners to get strategic infrastructure planned, funded and delivered
1.4	Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites	Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites
Safe, Clean and Green		
Ref	A- Current Areas of Focus (2021-26)	B- Exec Proposed Changes (2023-28)
2.1	Taking action against those who do not respect our public spaces, streets, green spaces and parks	Promote our parks and open spaces and ensuring that we enhance their natural qualities and meet the needs of residents and visitors. Take action against those who do not respect our public spaces.
2.2	Improving community safety by working with our partners to make people less vulnerable to crime	For people to be safe and feel safe we'll work with our partners to take action against those who break the law.
2.3	Maintain resident satisfaction with the cleanliness of the borough	Working to ensure resident satisfaction with the cleanliness and appearance of the whole borough
2.4	Implementation of the biodiversity and climate change strategy and action plan Changed to have a stronger emphasis	The impact on climate change and biodiversity will be central to all decisions.
2.5		Continue to maintain the quality and ensure the resilience of the waste service
Thriving Place		
Ref	A-Current Areas of Focus (2021-26)	B-Exec Proposed Changes (2023-28)

3.1	Deliver a sustainable and vibrant leisure and cultural offer	Deliver a sustainable and vibrant leisure and cultural offer. For example utilising opportunities such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund investment plans
3.2	Promote inward investment in the Borough to ensure a diverse employment and business offer	Promote inward investment in the Borough to ensure a diverse employment and business offer
3.3		Develop an ambitious Town Centre Strategy which reflects the needs of the wider community and creates a vibrant and transformed town centre for all.
	Working with community groups and parish councils, to develop more sustainable community resilience and to encourage pride in our borough	Merge into new – Action under Homes and communities at 4.3
	Working with partners to redevelop the Maidstone East site and modernise the bus station in the County Town	Merge into new – The bus station project is now completed and the Maidstone East site forms part of the town centre strategy action above at 3.3
	Developing and delivering plans for the five opportunity sites in the town centre and the staplehurst regeneration project	Merge into new – this now forms part of the town centre strategy which is covered in a new action at 3.3. The Staplehurst regeneration has moved on.

Homes and Communities		
Ref	A-Current Areas of Focus (2021-26)	B-Exec Proposed Changes (2023-28)
4.1	Reducing Rough Sleeping in a sustainable way	Continue our holistic and innovative approach to reduce rough sleeping in Maidstone
4.2	Reducing the use of temporary accommodation for homeless families	Increase supply of TA to assist with need and bring down the unit cost whilst working towards long-term housing solutions.
4.3.		Work with Anchor Institutions and partners to develop community resilience, improve well-being and taking action to support residents in financial crisis, aiming for no-one to be left behind
4.4		Urgent identification and delivery of 1000 affordable homes to ensure availability of good quality housing for Maidstone's residents
4.5	Improving housing through use of our statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing	Improving the quality of housing through the consistent use of our statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing
	Working with the integrated care Partnership to identify opportunities to reduce health inequalities in the borough	Deleted as covered in action 4.3. working with partners and 4.5

Agenda Item 15

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

17 January 2023

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	17 January 2023
Executive	25 January 2023
Council	22 February 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Council
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Mark Green, Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mark Green, Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report forms part of the process of agreeing a budget for 2023/24 and setting next year's Council Tax. Following consideration by this Committee at its meeting on 8 November 2022 of the draft Medium Term Finance Strategy for 2023/24 – 2027/28, this report sets out budget proposals for services within the remit of the Committee. These proposals will then be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 25 January 2023. The Executive will subsequently consider all elements of the budget for 2023/24 at its meeting on 8 February 2023, with a view to determining a final set of proposals for submission to Council on 22 February 2023.

Recommendation to the Communities Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

That the Committee recommends to the Executive that it approves:

1. The revenue budget proposals set out in Appendix A.
2. The capital budget proposals set out in Appendix B.

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The Medium Term Financial Strategy and the budget are a re-statement in financial terms of the priorities set out in the strategic plan. They reflect the Council's decisions on the allocation of resources to all objectives of the strategic plan.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Cross Cutting Objectives	The MTFS supports the cross-cutting objectives in the same way that it supports the Council's other strategic priorities.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Risk Management	This has been addressed in section 5 of the report.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Financial	The budget strategy and the MTFS impact upon all activities of the Council. The future availability of resources to address specific issues is planned through this process. It is important that the committee gives consideration to the strategic financial consequences of the recommendations in this report.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The process of developing the budget strategy will identify the level of resources available for staffing over the medium term.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Legal	Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) the Section 151 Officer has statutory duties in relation to the financial administration and stewardship of the authority, including securing effective arrangements for treasury management. The legal implications are detailed within the body of the report which is compliant with statutory and legal regulations such as the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management in Local Authorities. The Council is required to set a council tax by the 11 March in any year and has a statutory obligation to set a balanced budget. The budget requirements and basic amount of Council Tax must be calculated in accordance	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)

	<p>with the requirements of sections 31A and 31B to the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by sections 73-79 of the Localism Act 2011).</p> <p>The Council is required to determine whether the basic amount of council tax is excessive as prescribed in regulations – section 52ZB of the 1992 Act as inserted under Schedule 5 to the Localism Act 2011. The Council is required to hold a referendum of all registered electors in the borough if the prescribed requirements regarding whether the increase is excessive are met.</p> <p>Approval of the budget is a matter reserved for full Council upon recommendation by the Executive.</p>	
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes.	Senior Information Governance Officer
Equalities	The MFTS report scopes the possible impact of the Council’s future financial position on service delivery. When a policy, service or function is developed, changed or reviewed, an evidence-based equalities impact assessment will be undertaken. Should an impact be identified appropriate mitigations with be identified.	Equalities and Communities Officer
Public Health	The resources to achieve the Council’s objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Crime and Disorder	The resources to achieve the Council’s objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Procurement	The resources to achieve the Council’s objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The resources to achieve the Council’s objectives are allocated through the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.	Biodiversity & Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 2.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out in financial terms how the Council's Strategic Plan will be delivered over the next five years, given the resources available. In so doing, it establishes the framework for the annual budget setting process.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 15 November 2022, this Committee considered a draft MTFS for the five years 2023/24 to 2027/28. No material amendments were proposed to the MTFS by this Committee or subsequently by the Executive when it considered the MTFS at its meeting on 23 November 2022, so it will now go forward to Council for approval at its meeting on 22 February 2023.
- 2.3 The financial projections underlying the MTFS were prepared under a number of different scenarios, given uncertainty about local government funding and economic conditions generally. In the core scenario (Scenario 4) it was assumed that the Council would increase Council Tax by the maximum possible within the referendum threshold, but there would still be a budget gap of £2.5 million in 2023/24, mainly owing to the impact of inflation on the Council's costs, with a steadily increasing budget gap in subsequent years.
- 2.4 There is now better information about the funding context for 2023/24, given in particular the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022 and the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, announced on 19 December 2022. In addition, savings proposals totalling £1.1 million for 2023/24 have been developed. Whilst the longer term position remains challenging, these recent developments have had a positive impact, such that it is now anticipated that the Council will be able to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, provided that the savings proposals are adopted and Council Tax is increased up to the referendum threshold. Further details are set out below.

Autumn Statement 2022

- 2.5 The Chancellor announced the Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022. The background was the need to demonstrate that the government had a clear plan to meet a shortfall in the public finances of around £55 billion. The shortfall was met through a mix of tax rises and spending cuts, although the real impact of the cuts will not be felt until after 2024.
- 2.6 The key points from the Autumn Statement for local government were as follows.
 - Council Tax referendum limit - The core threshold was increased from 1.99% to 2.99%, and the Adult Social Care precept will be 2% in 2023-24.

- Business rates - The multiplier will be frozen in 2023-24, rather than increasing by inflation as in the past. Local authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income arising.
- Business rates reliefs - Retail, Hospitality and Leisure reliefs were extended into 2023-24, and a Supporting Small Business Scheme has been introduced.
- Business rates revaluation – The revaluation scheduled for April 2023 will go ahead but there will be a more generous transitional scheme.

2.7 The effect of the increase in Council Tax referendum thresholds is that lower tier authorities like Maidstone may put up Council Tax by up to 2.99%, whilst upper tier authorities may increase their Council Tax by up to 4.99%. If both Maidstone BC and Kent County Council increase Council Tax by the maximum possible, the additional amounts payable by a Band D Council Tax payer would be as follows:

- Maidstone Borough Council - £8.20
- Kent County Council - £72.90

2.8 Maidstone Borough Council retains around 10% of the business rates that it collects and the baseline contribution to the Council's overall budget is approximately £4 million. The announcement in the Autumn Statement that government will compensate councils for the loss of income from freezing business rates for ratepayers means that, broadly, MBC's share of business rates will increase in line with inflation.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24

2.9 The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2023/24 was announced on 19 December 2022. This reiterated the key measures in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement relevant to local government. The main items of new information relevant to Maidstone Borough Council were as follows.

New Homes Bonus will be paid in 2023/24, but will be based on housing completions in 2021/22 only. Formerly NHB also included a legacy payment based on historic housing completions.

Services Grant will reduce in 2023-24, in part because there will no longer be an increase in National Insurance Contributions and no related compensation (the increase in NICs was originally planned by Chancellor Sunak, then reversed).

Lower Tier Services Grant – not payable in 2023/24 – the funding will be used along with New Homes Bonus to pay for the Funding Guarantee (see below).

2.10 It is proposed to create a new one-off Funding Guarantee, which will ensure that all authorities see at least a 3% increase in their Core Spending Power, before any decision they make about organisational efficiencies, use of reserves, and council tax levels. Core Spending Power is the measure used

by government to evaluate what they consider to be the underlying financial position of local authorities. This guarantee relates to 2023/24 only and there is no indication as to whether a similar guarantee will be offered in 2024/25.

2.11 The following table shows Maidstone Council's Core Spending Power for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

	2022/23	2023/24	Change	
	£000	£000	£000	%
Council Tax	18,207	19,124 ¹	+917	+5.0%
Retained Business Rates ²	3,594	4,186	+592	+16.5%
<i>Sub-total – Core Funding³</i>	<i>21,801</i>	<i>23,310</i>	<i>1,509</i>	<i>6.9%</i>
New Homes Bonus	4,216	1,889	-2,327	-55.2%
Services Grant	225	127	-98	-43.6%
Lower Tier Services Grant	149	0	-149	-100.0%
Funding Guarantee	0	2,640	+2,640	N/A
<i>Sub-total – One-off Funding</i>	<i>4,590</i>	<i>4,656</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>1.4%</i>
Core Spending Power	26,391	27,966	+1,575	+6.0% ⁴

Notes

¹ Assumes Council Tax increased to the referendum threshold. Notwithstanding that the Funding Guarantee is calculated before allowing for any Council Tax increases, the government's Core Spending Power calculations assume that all authorities will increase Council Tax by the maximum permitted.

² Notional Business Rates income based on the government's baseline. Growth above this baseline is not included here.

³ Council Tax and Business Rates are treated as part of the Council's core funding, whereas New Homes Bonus and other unringfenced government grants have historically not been used by the Council to fund ongoing revenue expenditure.

⁴ The government has advertised the Local Government Finance Settlement as giving local authorities an extra 9%. This is a national average and district councils like Maidstone are generally seeing a lower increase.

2.12 It can be seen that the Funding Guarantee has protected the Council against the reduction in the following elements of Core Spending Power:

- New Homes Bonus
- Services Grant
- Lower Tier Services Grant.

Specifically, the main benefit of the Funding Guarantee from Maidstone's perspective is that the Council is protected against the reduction in New Homes Bonus.

2.13 The Council agreed last year to set aside £1 million of New Homes Bonus for strategic policy and plan making and £3.2 million for the 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme, given the requirement over the 10 year life

of the programme for a total revenue subsidy of £50,000 per unit. Within the overall budget proposals for 2023/24, it is now proposed that £300,000 of the one-off funding will be set aside for strategic policy and plan making, with this sum being built into the revenue budget on an ongoing basis. The balance of one-off funding will be set aside for the 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme.

Revenue Budget Proposals

2.14 The draft MTFS described how, in bridging the budget gap, the Council would need to balance the requirement to make savings or generate increased income against the key priorities set out in the Council's Strategic Plan, namely:

- Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure
- Homes and Communities
- A Thriving Place
- Safe, Clean and Green.

2.15 It was explained that all budgets would be reviewed in detail to identify opportunities for savings, or increased income, which can be delivered with the minimum impact on the strategic priorities. To the extent that further growth is planned, above and beyond existing budgets, this would need to be offset by further savings.

2.16 The following growth and savings have been identified in the services falling within the remit of the Communities Housing and Environment Committee.

- Waste Services – replacement of wheeled bins - £100,000 saving

The Council currently provides replacement wheeled bins free of charge, which costs in the region of £250,000 each year, depending on demand. Bins require replacement for a number of reasons, including damage by the waste collection contractor and failure by the contractor to return the bin after collection. This proposal is to recover the costs for the provision of these bins by charging the relevant party for their replacement. A flowchart will be published setting out liability in each scenario where a replacement is required. This is expected to reduce costs by £200,000 per year, but once the current overspend against budget is offset, the saving to the Council will be £100,000 per year.

- Garden waste collection – changes to charging arrangements - £20,000 saving (2023/24); £80,000 saving (2024/25); £80,000 saving (2026/27)

The following changes are proposed over the MTFS period:

1. Introduction of £10 charge in 2023/24 for new subscribers to cover the delivery (and future removal) of the garden bin, delivering additional income of £20,000 whilst the service continues to grow.

2. Increase to annual garden subscription charges in 2024/25, following the introduction of the new waste collection contract, of £2.50 per annum delivering additional income of £80,000.

3. A further increase of £2.50 per annum in 2026/27.

- Additional income from cemetery - £60,000 saving

Net income from the cemetery exceeded budget for the first six months of 2022/23 by £33,000. The refurbishment of the chapel is likely to generate further income growth. A sustainable increase in income can therefore be anticipated and it is appropriate to increase the budget for cemetery income by £60,000. Note that this increase is based entirely on additional volumes and does not affect the charges which were considered by this Committee at its meeting in December.

- Additional income from crematorium - £60,000 saving

Net income from the crematorium exceeded budget for the first six months of 2022/23 by £46,000. This level of income is considered to be sustainable, so it is appropriate to increase the annual budget for crematorium income by £60,000. Note that this increase is based entirely on additional volumes and does not affect the charges which were considered by this Committee at its meeting in December.

- Review of Housing and Regulatory Services budgets - £26,000 saving

Housing and Regulatory Services consistently achieve a better than budget performance. It is anticipated that a detailed review of section code budgets will allow a reduction of £26,000 in total to be achieved.

- Digital Borough Insight - £18,000 saving

Printing and distributing each edition of Borough Insight costs around £30,000. This cost has been offset in 2022/23 by one-off grant funding and a modest amount of advertising revenue. By moving to a digital Borough Insight the net budget of £18,000 could be saved.

- Increased Pollution Control income - £5,000 saving

Environmental Health recharge the costs of air pollution sampling work for third parties. This is not currently reflected fully in the budget. An increase of £5,000 in the budget for cost recovery is therefore considered to be sustainable.

- Licensing expenditure budgets not required - £5,000 saving

The licensing service maintains expenditure budgets, eg for monitoring the taxi rank, which are in excess of the amounts required.

- CCTV maintenance - £4,000 saving

Since CCTV monitoring has been brought in-house, it has been possible to maintain the system at a significantly lower cost than originally anticipated without any adverse impact on performance.

Capital Budget Proposals

2.17 Capital investment helps the Council to deliver its strategic priorities. Capital programme schemes falling within the remit of this Policy Advisory Committee are as follows.

- 1,000 Homes Affordable Housing Programme - £72.4 million

In Autumn 2021 the Leader of the Council announced his ambition to build 1,000 affordable homes in the shortest period possible. A development strategy setting out how this ambition could best be achieved was agreed by Policy & Resources Committee on 19th January 2022. It is likely that the whole programme will take ten years to deliver. The programme is likely to provide only Affordable Rented homes that will be let at 80% of market rent, capped at the Local Housing Allowance.

The expenditure shown in the capital programme is net of any grant receipts from the likes of Homes England and the Council's own direct subsidy. This subsidy will be provided through a separate Housing Investment Fund, into which the Council will make payments from one-off sources of funding including New Homes Bonus and the Funding Guarantee, as explained in paragraph 2.13 above.

Expenditure in the initial years of the programme will be relatively modest as the focus will be upon land identification and acquisition, and the more costly works contracts will follow in the later years.

- Private Rented Sector Housing Programme - £33.1 million

This incorporates a number of schemes that are in the process of being developed, some linked to the affordable housing programme. These will be the subject of separate committee reports at the point a decision to proceed or not is required. This budget includes the refurbishment works being undertaken at Granada House.

There is also further funding for indicative schemes which come forward that represent opportunities to grow the market rented portfolio. Some schemes have already been identified and exploratory talks and early negotiations have been undertaken.

- Temporary Accommodation - £32.0 million

The Council has a programme to acquire housing on the open market for temporary accommodation, as it is more cost-effective to use our own property for this purpose and enables delivery of a revenue saving. It is proposed to buy further units in over the next three years to deal with the rising numbers of people who are being made homeless as a result of the current economic crisis.

- Commercial Development (Maidstone East) - £1.97 million

The New Business and Housing Development team are in the process of preparing and submitting a planning application for the site. It will comprise circa 220 residential units, but in order to respond to the Local Plan Policy for the site, the scheme will need to include some non-residential (commercial) space too. At this stage, the expectation that this will be a Health related usage, most likely a GP surgery. A positive dialogue is ongoing with the local health trust, but no firm commitments have been made at this stage. This commercial usage is relatively modest in scale relative to the proposed residential accommodation.

- Heather House Community Centre - £1.4 million

The Council decided to make a planning application to replace this facility with a brand-new community centre, together with the redevelopment of the adjacent Royal British Legion Pavilion site (for new housing), that also features in the capital programme. A resolution to grant planning permission was made in November 2022, and the works for both sites are currently being procured. Prior to any works contract being let, a further approval will be required by The Executive, and it is envisaged that a proposal will be ready to consider in circa April 2023. The cost of the new community infrastructure may be offset to some degree by a combination of external grants, contributions, S106 and possibly even CIL monies.

- Disabled Facilities Grants - £4.0 million

The Council works with Kent County Council Social Services to deliver adaptations and facilities to enable disabled people to remain at home. This element of the capital programme therefore has a directly beneficial impact for individual local residents. Assistance under this budget is not funded by the Council but is funded from the Department of Health Better Care Fund (BCF) as a specific capital grant.

- Acquisitions Officers Social Housing Delivery Partnership - £200,000

This funding is for two Acquisitions Officers to ensure delivery of the affordable housing programme, with the costs of the posts and ancillary costs capitalised and charged to the programme.

- Street Scene Investment - £250,000

This capital programme item allows for items such as the provision of new bins.

- Flood Action Plan - £550,000

The Council works with the Environment Agency and Kent County Council as part of the Medway Flood Partnership to develop measures to manage and reduce flood risk. A capital budget of £1 million was set aside for a flood action plan following the last major floods in the Maidstone area in winter 2013/14. No large scale flood mitigation scheme was found to be feasible and individual household flood

mitigation measures have been funded through central government grants. The residual budget is therefore being carried forward to fund further schemes that may be developed, including natural flood management schemes.

- Continued Improvements to Play Areas - £280,000

This budget allows for play areas to continue to be upgraded to ensure they meet the current specifications and requirements.

- Parks Improvements - £330,000

This is an annual budget to allow for any works that are identified in the parks to be undertaken, particularly where there is a health and safety issue to be addressed.

- Section 106 Funded Works Open Spaces - £2.0 million

This reflects open spaces capital projects that are funded by S.106 contributions. These works have been taking place for a number of years but it is considered appropriate that the programme reflects this to show the total forecast capital expenditure.

- Expansion of Cemetery - £200,000

Further works are required to complete the tarmacking works in the cemetery and there are further plans for new fencing and possible expansion of the site to create space for new graves.

- Expansion of Crematorium - £340,000

The proposal is to invest in a café and a florist on the site to generate additional revenue at the crematorium. Completion of the covered walkway is also included in the scheme.

- Purchase of New Waste Collection Vehicles - £5.8 million

As part of the new waste collection contract the Council is planning to fund the capital costs of the new vehicle fleet, as it can access borrowing at lower rates than the contractor, and this will significantly reduce the costs of the contract. The budget sum includes a contingency for potential material and labour cost increases during the manufacturing process. The capital cost of the fleet was included within the evaluation process to ensure value for money is achieved.

Details are set out in Appendix B to this report.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Recommend the budget proposals relating to this Committee as set out in Appendices A and B for approval by the Executive.
- 3.2 Propose changes to the budget proposals.

3.3 Make no comment on the budget proposals.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Executive must recommend to Council at its meeting on 8 February 2023 a balanced budget and a proposed level of Council Tax for the coming year. The budget proposals included in this report will allow the Executive to do this. Accordingly, the preferred option is that this Committee agrees the budget proposals at Appendices A and B.

5. RISK

5.1 The Council's finances are subject to a high degree of risk and uncertainty. The draft MTFS includes an evaluation of the Council's financial resilience, from which it can be seen that it has adequate, but not excessive, reserves and is positioned well to manage the financial challenges that it faces.

5.2 In order to address risk on an ongoing basis in a structured way and to ensure that appropriate mitigations are developed, the Council has developed a budget risk register. This seeks to capture all known budget risks and to present them in a readily comprehensible way. The budget risk register is updated regularly and is reviewed by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee at each of its meetings.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 The Executive received an initial report on the MTFS at its meeting on 20 July 2022 and it agreed the approach set out in that report to development of an MTFS for 2023/24 - 2027/28 and a budget for 2023/24.

6.2 Policy Advisory Committees and the Executive then considered a draft MTFS at their meetings in November 2022.

6.3 Public consultation on the budget has been carried out. Details are set out in Appendix C. Members are encouraged to review the findings and assess whether the budget proposals are consistent with public expectations and aspirations.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 The timetable for developing the budget for 2023/24 is set out below.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Action</i>
25 January 2023	Executive	Consider 23/24 budget proposals

8 February 2023	Executive	Agree 23/24 budget proposals for recommendation to Council
22 February 2023	Council	Approve 23/24 budget

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Revenue Budget Proposals 2023/24 – 2027/28
 - Appendix B: Capital Budget Proposals 2023/24 – 2027/28
 - Appendix C: Budget Survey 2023
-

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background papers.

Revenue Budget Proposals 2023/24 - 2027/28

Service	Proposal	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	Total
		£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Waste Services	Replacement of wheeled bins	-100	0	0	0	0	-100
Garden Waste Collection	Changes to charging arrangements	-20	-80	0	-80	0	-180
Cemetery	Additional income from Cemetery - based on increased volume not price increase.	-60	0	0	0	0	-60
Crematorium	Additional income from Crematorium - based on increased volume not price increase.	-60	0	0	0	0	-60
Communications	Integration of Visitor Economy within Communications team	-30	0	0	0	0	
Housing & Regulatory Services	Review of section codes to identify areas of savings.	-26	0	0	0	0	-26
Strategy, Insight and Governance	Digital Borough Insight	-18	0	0	0	0	-18
Housing	Increased pollution control income	-5	0	0	0	0	-5
Housing	Licensing expenditure budgets not required	-5	0	0	0	0	-5
Community Protection	Review of CCTV budgets	-4	0	0	0	0	-4
OVERALL CHANGE IN BUDGET (£000)		-328	-80	0	-80	0	-458

Negative figures shown above represent a reduction in expenditure budgets, or increased income targets. Positive figures indicate increased expenditure, or a reduction in the income budget.

Capital Budget Proposals 2023/24 - 2027/28

	22/23	Five Year Plan					Total
	Projected	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Homes and Communities</i>							
1,000 Affordable Homes Programme	7,600	333	16,960	21,535	17,237	16,382	72,448
Private Rented Sector Housing	2,273	3,090	6,765	6,832	9,578	6,861	33,125
Temporary Accommodation	4,330	12,000	12,000	8,000			32,000
Commercial Development - Maidstone East	200	156	623	623	468	100	1,970
Heather House	150	319	701	351	75		1,446
Disabled Facilities Grants	1,640	800	800	800	800	800	4,000
Springfield Mill - Phase 2	731						
Affordable Housing Programme - Trinity Place	500						
Acquisitions Officer - Social Housing	160	200					200
<i>Safe, Clean and Green</i>							
Street Scene Investment	70	50	50	50	50	50	250
Flood Action Plan	430	200	200	150			550
Electric Operational Vehicles	84						
Vehicle Telematics & Camera	22						
Rent & Housing Management IT	11						
Installation of Public Water	15						
Crematorium & Cemetery Development Plan	250						
Continued Improvements to Play Areas	126	50	50	60	60	60	280
Parks Improvements	152	50	60	70	70	80	330
Gypsy & Traveller Sites	1,421	600					600
Waste Crime Team - Additional Resources	25						
Section 106 funded works - Open Spaces	400	400	400	400	400	400	2,000
Expansion of Cemetery (New)		80	120				200
Expansion of Crematorium (New)		340					340
Purchase of New Waste Collection Vehicles (New)		5,800					5,800
	20,589	24,468	38,730	38,871	28,737	24,733	146,599



BUDGET SURVEY

2023

Produced November 2022

ABSTRACT

A report summarising the results of Maidstone Borough Council's Budget Survey 2023.

Consultation@maidstone.gov.uk

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of Maidstone Council's Budget Survey 2023/24. The survey was conducted to gauge opinion on Council spending as well as its priorities and investment programmes.

Maidstone Borough Council is committed to providing high quality and good value services to meet the needs of the local community.

Reductions in central government funding and the pandemic have had a significant impact on the Council's finances and will continue to do so. Looking further ahead, the financial outlook for Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is uncertain, given the lasting impact of the pandemic and lack of information about the level of central government support in the future.

As part of that process, the Council sought to understand residents' views on where they think savings should be made and what the Council's priorities for spending should be.

Methodology

The survey was open between 20 October and 20 November 2022.

The survey was carried out online, with a direct email sent to approximately 9,000 residents who had consented to being contacted by email. The survey was also promoted on the Council's website, social media, in Borough Insight and in the local press. The survey was open to all Maidstone Borough residents aged 18 years and over.

A total of 1,332 people responded to the questionnaire. Data has been weighted according to the known population profile to counteract non-response bias. The weighting profile is based on the 2020 mid-year ONS population estimates. However, the under-representation of 18- to 34-year-olds means that high weights have been applied to responses in this group, therefore the results for this group should be treated with caution. In addition, the result for minority groups should also be treated with caution due to the sample being unrepresentative of the local population.

The economically active group includes respondents in employment (full, part-time or self-employed) or who are looking for work.

Please note not every respondent answered every question, therefore the total number of respondents refers to the number of weighted respondents for the question being discussed not to the survey overall.

With a total of 1,332 responses to the survey, the overall results in this report are accurate to $\pm 2.7\%$ at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% certain that the results are between $\pm 2.7\%$ of the calculated response, so the 'true' response could be 2.7% above or below the figures reported (i.e., a 50% agreement rate could in reality lie within the range of 47.3% to 52.7%).

Findings

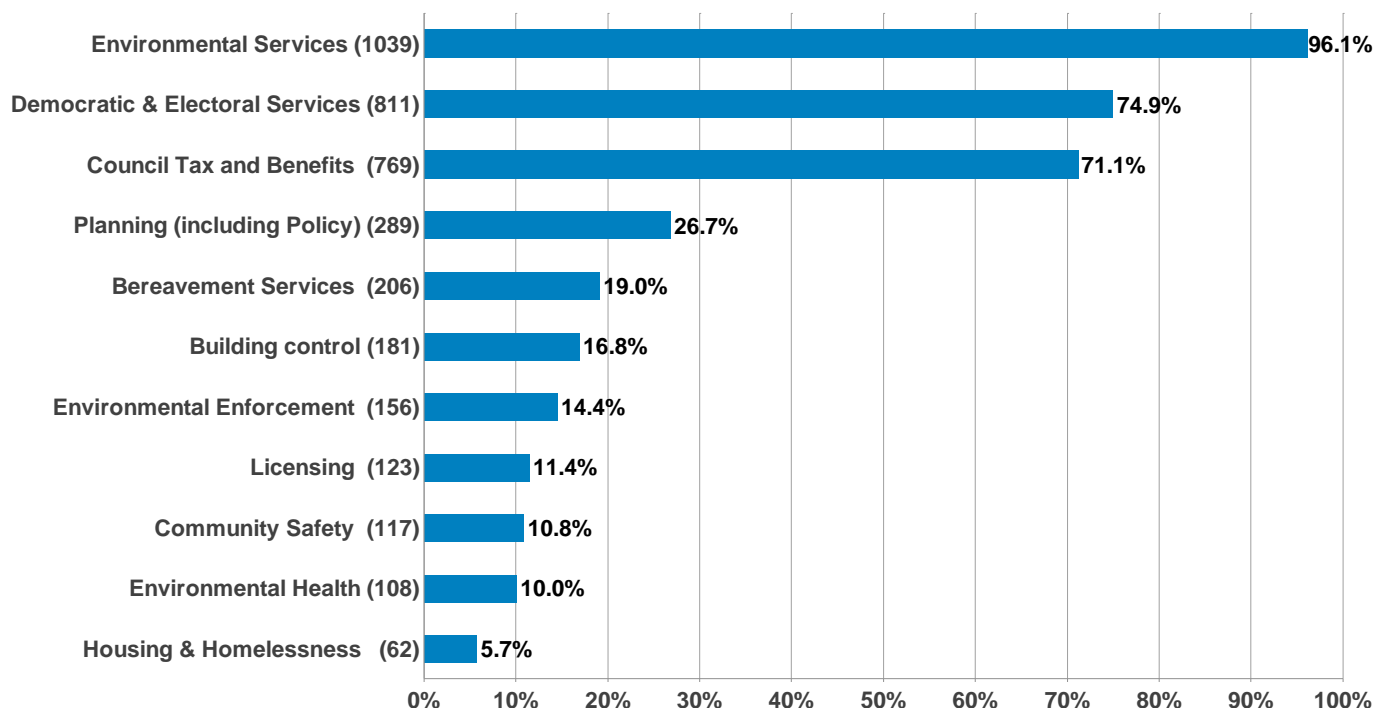
- Environmental Services was the most used service mandatory service and the most important mandatory service with 96% and 87% responding this way respectively.
- The most common mandatory service that people felt should be reduced was Democratic & Electoral Services with 936 answering this way.
- 87% of respondents told us they have used Parking Services making it the most used discretionary service, while Parks and Open Spaces was deemed the most important service (87%).
- Markets and Civic events were most common discretionary services that people felt should be reduced with 431 and 420 answering this way respectively.
- Infrastructure including flood prevention remained the top investment priority for the third year in a row.
- Overall satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has increased from 51.0% in 2021 to 57.8%.

Mandatory Services

Mandatory Services Used

The survey asked respondents to select the services they had used from a list of services that the Council is required to provide by law. A total of 1,082 responses were received.

The most common response was Environmental Services with 1,039 respondents telling us they have used this service. The least common response was Housing & Homelessness with 62 respondents telling us they have used this service.



Demographic Differences

- Female respondents and the economically inactive were significantly more likely than their counterparts to have used Council Tax and Benefits services.
- Economically inactive respondents were more likely than economically active to have used Democratic & Electoral services with 83.5% compared to 71.6% of economically inactive respondents.

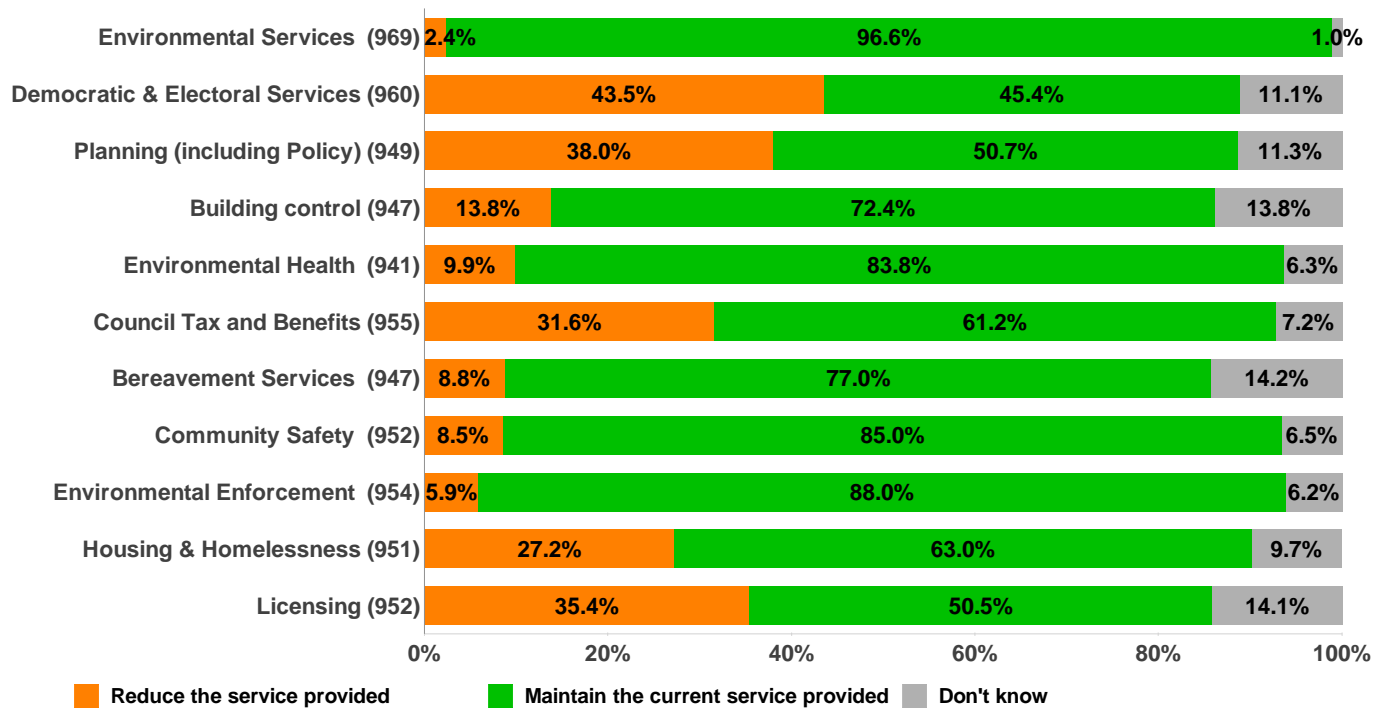
Mandatory Services Spending Approaches

Respondents were provided with the list of mandatory services detailing the current spend for each per council tax band D household. They were asked to indicate what approach they felt the Council should take in delivering the mandatory services. Three options were provided for respondents to select from:

- Reduce the service provided
- Maintain the current service
- Don't know.

There was a total of 969 responses to this set of questions. Democratic Services and Planning (including policy) had the greatest proportions where respondents stated 'reduce the service provided' at 43.5% and 38.0% respectively.

Environmental Services and Environmental Enforcement had the greatest proportions where respondents answered, 'maintain the current service' at 96.6% and 88.0% respectively.



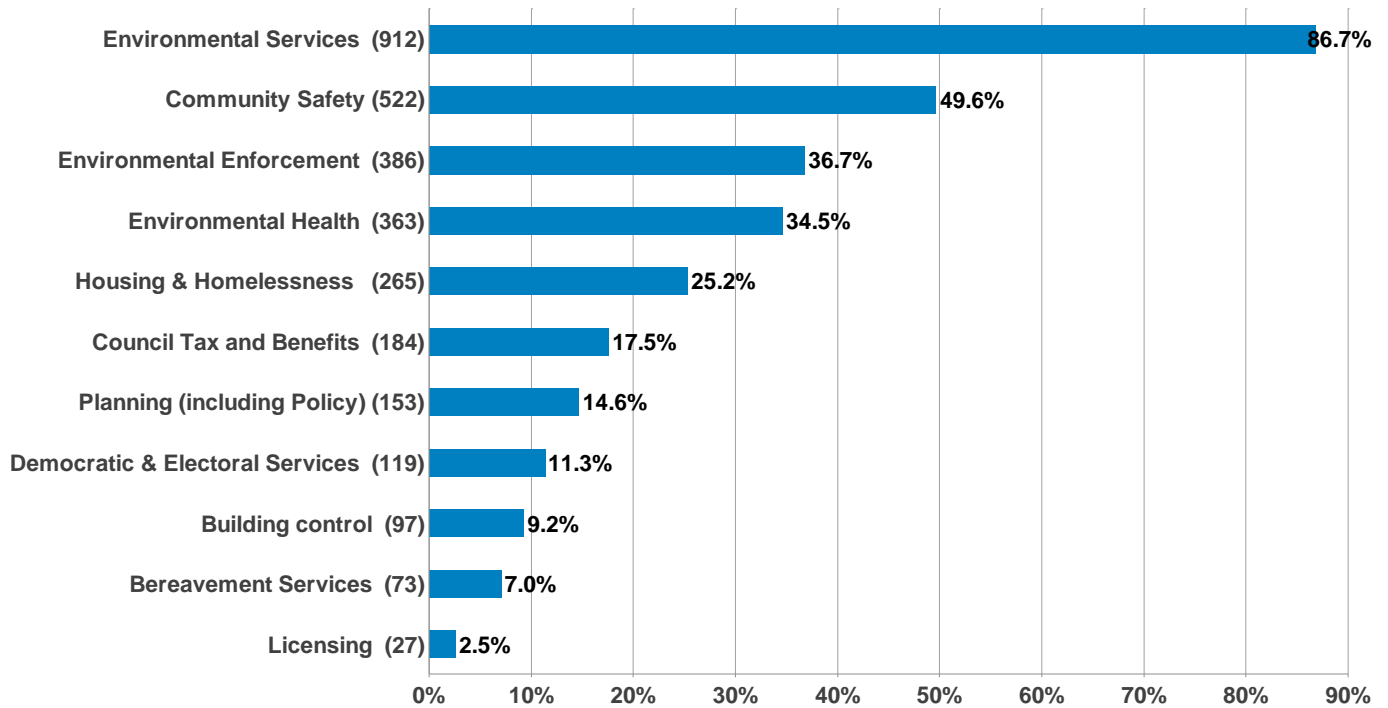
Demographic Differences

- A significantly greater proportion of respondents with a disability said that the Planning (including policy) service should be reduced with 57.3% answering this way compared to 34.8% of respondents without a disability.
- Respondents who have lived in the borough between 3 and 5 years had a significantly greater than average proportion that said Building Control should be reduced at 28.6%.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said that Council Tax and Benefits services should be reduced with 39.2% answering this way compared to 26.0% of female respondents. Economically active respondents were also more likely than their counterparts to say that this service should be reduced.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said that Bereavement services should be reduced with 12.8% answering this way compared to 4.6% of female respondents.
- Male respondents and respondents with a disability had significantly greater proportions than their counterparts that said that Community Safety services should be reduced.
- Male respondents and respondents under 35 years had greater proportions than their counterparts that said Environmental Enforcement services should be reduced.
- Respondents from minority groups and male respondents had significantly greater proportions stating that Housing & Homelessness services should be reduced at 63.9% and 34.4% respectively, compared to the overall response of 27.3%.
- Respondents who have lived in the borough for less than a year had a significantly lower proportion that said that Licensing services should be reduced compared to their counterparts.

Most Important Mandatory Services

The survey asked respondents to select which three Mandatory services provided by the Council were most important to them.

There were 912 responses to this question. The most common response was Environmental Services with 912 respondents selecting this service. The least common response was Licensing with 27 respondents selecting this service at one of their top three services.



Demographic Differences

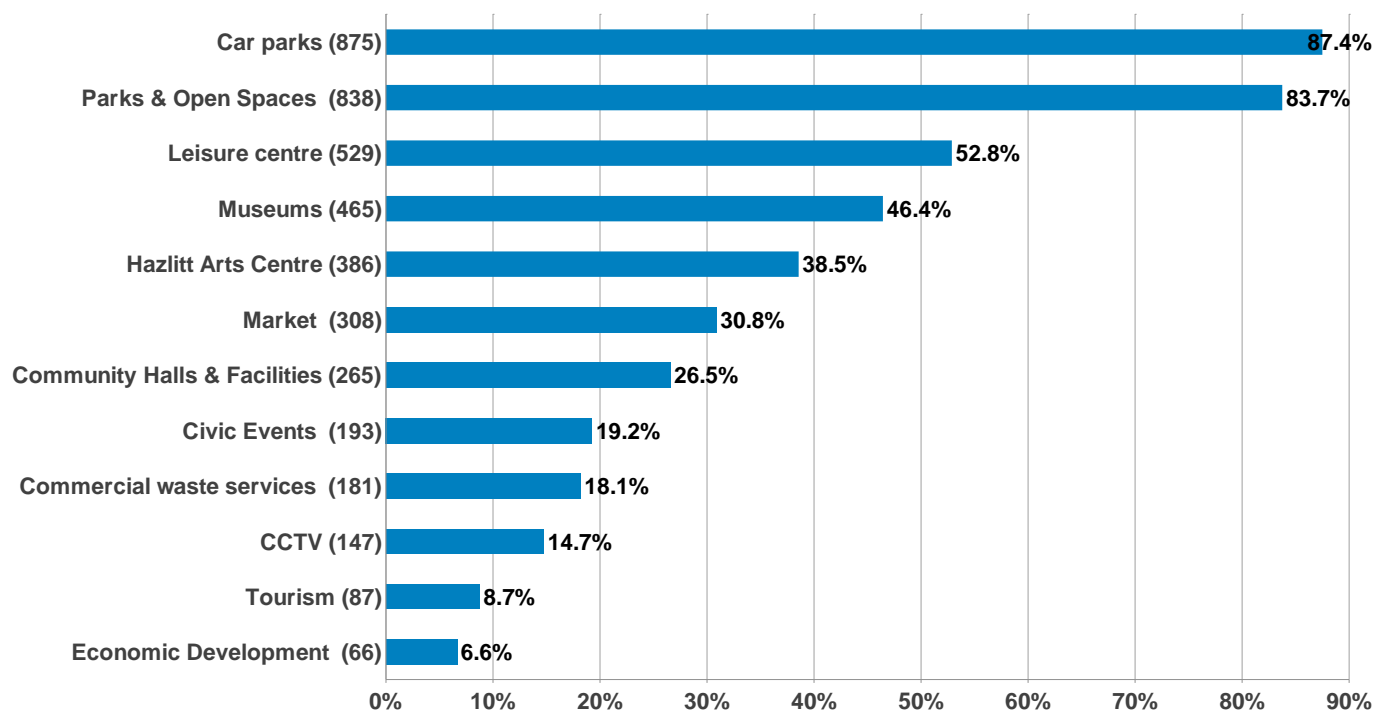
- Environmental services was the most common response across all demographic groups.
- Respondents who had lived at their current address for less than a year were only group where community safety did not have the second greatest proportion. This group's second choice was Environmental Health with 60.2% and Community Safety was third for this group.
- There were three groups whose third most important Mandatory Service response differed from the overall result. These were 18- to 34-year-olds, minority respondents and those who have lived at their present addresses for less than a year. These three groups put Environmental Health above Environmental Enforcement.

Discretionary Services

Discretionary Services Used

The survey asked respondents to select the services that they had used from a list of services that the Council is not required to provide by law but chooses to do so. A total of 875 responses were received.

The most common response was car parks with 875 (87.4%) telling us they have used this service. The least common response was Economic Development with 66 (6.6%) telling us they have used this service.



Demographic Differences

- Car parks and Parks & Open spaces were the two most common responses across all groups.
- Minority group respondents were significantly less likely to have used Parks & Open Spaces compared to white groups with 62.0% compared to 85.2% of white group respondents.
- Female respondents, the economically inactive and those without a disability were significantly more likely than their counterparts to have used the Leisure Centre.
- The data suggests that there is a linear negative relationship between age and using the Leisure Centre, meaning that as people age, they are less likely to use the Leisure Centre.
- Respondents aged 35 to 44 years were more likely than the other age groups to have used the Market at 43.7%.
- Female respondents were significantly more likely to have used the Hazlitt Arts Centre with 43.3% selecting this service compared to 32.6% of male respondents.

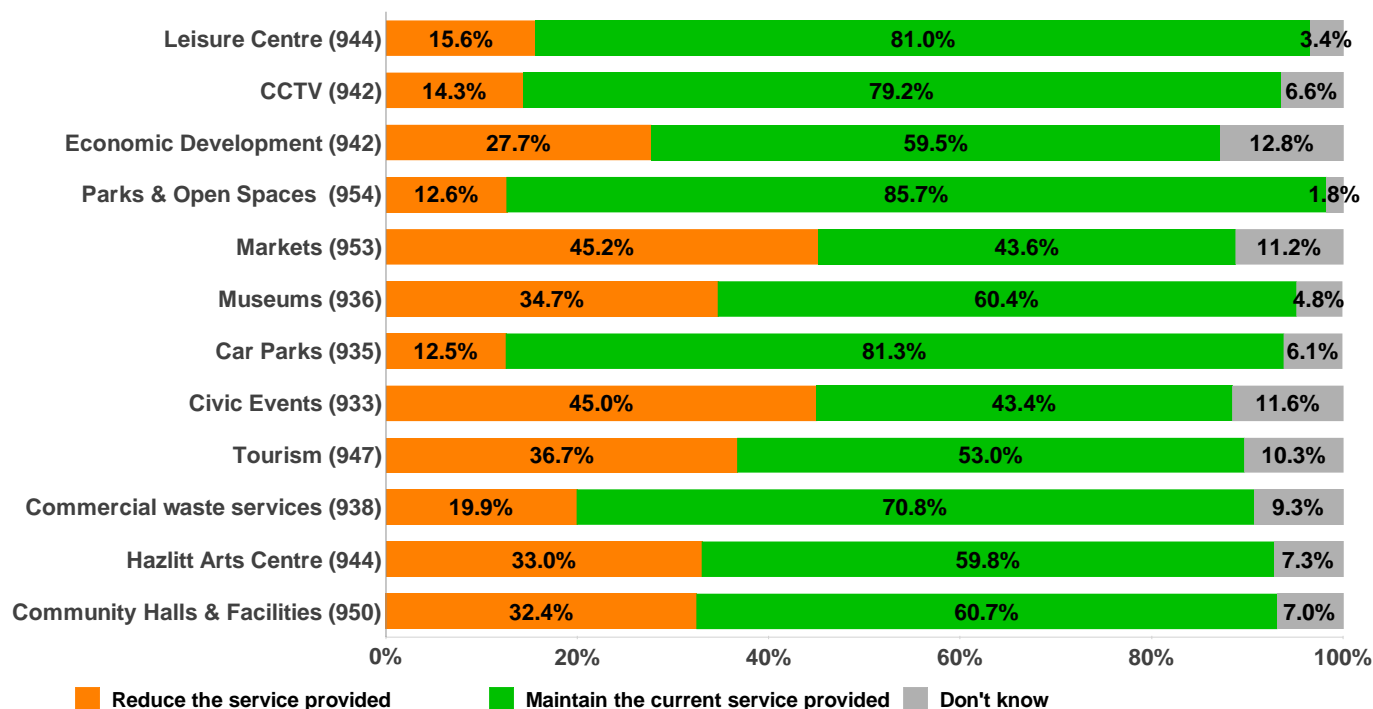
Discretionary Services Spending Approaches

Respondents were provided with the list of discretionary services detailing the current spend for each per council tax band D household. They were asked to indicate what approach they felt the Council should take in delivering the mandatory services. Three options provided for respondents to select from were:

- Reduce the service provided,
- Maintain the current service
- Don't know.

There was a total of 954 responses to this set of questions. Markets and Civic events had the greatest proportions where respondents stated 'reduce the service provided' at 45.2% and 45.0% respectively.

Parks & Open Spaces and Car Parks had the greatest proportions where respondents answered, 'maintain the current service' at 85.7% and 81.3% respectively.



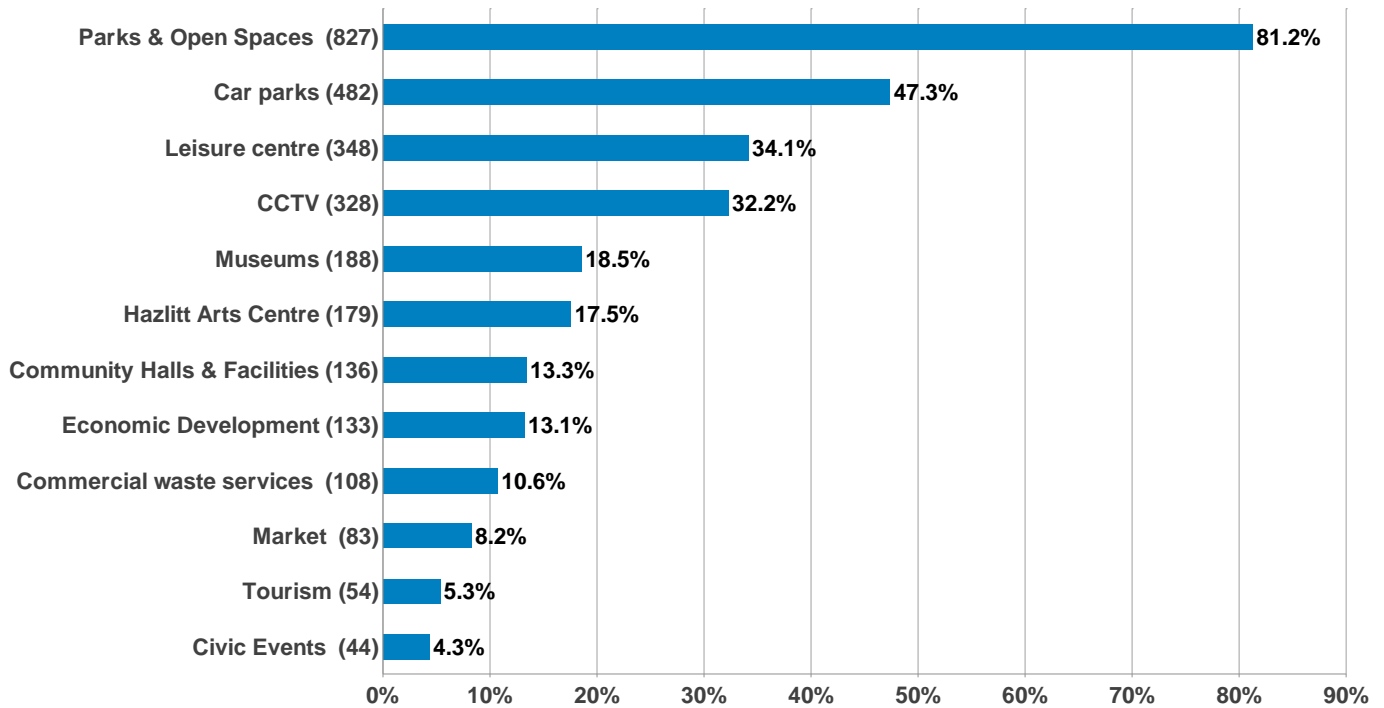
Demographic Differences

- A significantly greater proportion of respondents with a disability and those who are economically inactive said that Parks & Open Spaces should be reduced at 19.9% and 19.2% respectively.
- The proportion stating that Parks & Open Spaces should be reduced increases with age.
- A significantly greater proportion of economically inactive respondents said that the Market should be reduced with 50.1% answering this way compared to 42.6% of economically active respondents.
- A significantly greater proportion of male respondents said the Museum should be reduced with 37.9% answering this way compared to 30.5% of female respondents.
- Respondents with a disability had significantly greater proportion than those without a disability that said that Car Park services should be reduced with 19.7% answering this way compared to 11.1% of non-disabled respondents.
- Male respondents, economically inactive respondents and respondents in the age groups 55 years and upwards had greater than average proportions that said that civic events should be reduced.
- More than half of respondents with a disability said that Tourism should be reduced, significantly greater than the overall result and that for respondents without a disability.
- Respondents from minority groups and economically active respondents had significantly greater proportions stating that Commercial waste services should be reduced compared to their counterparts at 54.7% and 22.4% respectively.
- Male respondents and minority group respondents had significantly greater proportions than their counterparts that said that the Hazlitt Arts Centre and Community Halls & Facilities should be reduced.

Most Important Discretionary Services

The survey asked respondents to select the three discretionary services that were most important to them.

There were 827 responses to this question. The most common response was Parks & Open Spaces with 827 selecting this service. The least common response was Civic Events with 44 selecting this service as one of their top three.



Demographic Differences

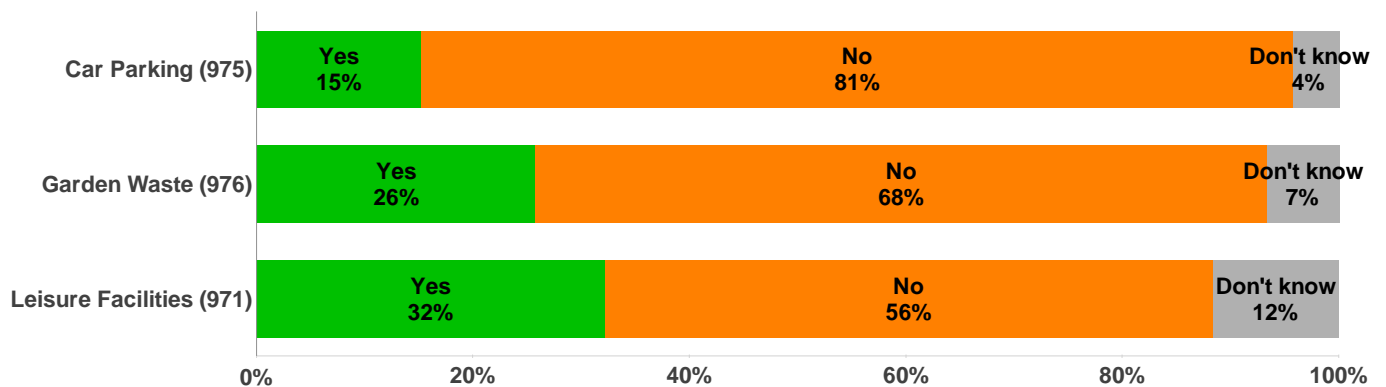
- Parks & Open Spaces was the most common response across all demographic groups.
- The second most common response was Car parks for all but three groups:
 - The Leisure centre was the second most common response for the 18 to 34 years and the 35 to 44 years groups. Both groups third most common response was Car parks.
 - The second most common response for those who had lived at their current address between 3 and 5 years was CCTV. This groups third most common response was the Leisure centre.

Paying more for services

The survey asked respondents if they would be prepared to pay more for car parking, garden waste and leisure facilities. There were 976 responses to this question.

Just under a third of respondents said they would pay more to use leisure facilities and just over a quarter said they would be prepared to pay more for garden waste collection.

Would you be willing to pay more for any of the following services?



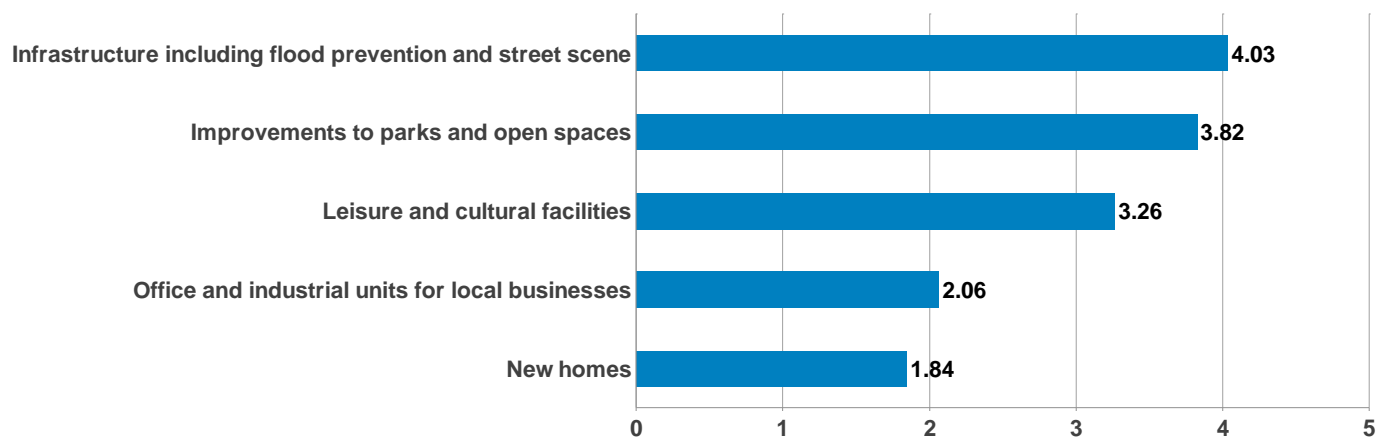
Demographic Differences

- Respondents from minority groups had a significantly greater proportion in favour of raising charges for car parking with 36.7% responding this way compared to 14.6% of respondents from white groups.
- Male respondents had a significant greater proportion in favour of increasing charges around leisure facilities with 41.3% answering this way compared to 24.9% of female respondents.

Priorities & Investments

Survey respondents were asked to place a list of investment programme priorities into their preferred order of importance. A total of 1,016 respondents ranked the investment priorities.

To assess this data, a weighted average has been used. The programmes placed first received 5 points and the programmes ranked last were given 1 point. These were then added together and divided by the number of respondents to give a weighted average.



This question was asked in the 2021/22 Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2020 and the 2022/23 Budget Survey undertaken in Autumn 2021. Since the 2021/22 survey the order of the top three programmes has not changed.

In 2021/22 New Homes was ranked as fifth but moved up a place to fourth in 2022/23 and Office and Industrial units for local businesses has dropped from fourth to fifth. For this year (2023/24) New Homes has moved back to being the lowest priority for residents.

Demographic Differences

- Economically inactive respondents were more likely than economically active respondent to rank infrastructure, including flood prevention and street scene, as their top priority with 62.2% responding this way compared to 42.7% of the economically active group.
- The survey data suggests that as age increases there is a greater likelihood of Infrastructure being ranked first.
- Female respondents had a significantly greater proportion that ranked new homes last with 62.9% ranking this priority as fifth compared to 51.8% of male respondents.

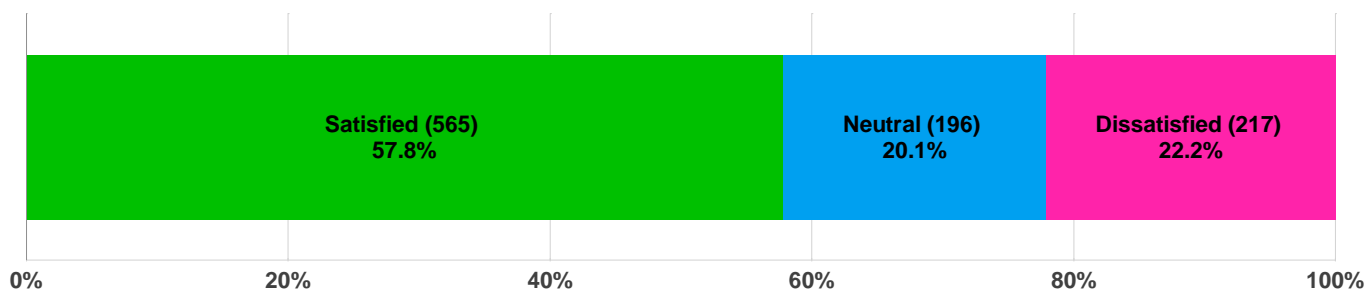
Living in Maidstone

Local area Satisfaction

Survey respondents were asked: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?' and given a five-point scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. There was a total of 978 respondents.

The most common response was 'fairly satisfied' with 438 answering this way.

In the last Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2021, 51.0% of respondents answered positively. This has increased by 6.8 percentage points to 57.8% for the current year and demonstrates an overall increase in resident's satisfaction with Maidstone as a place to live.



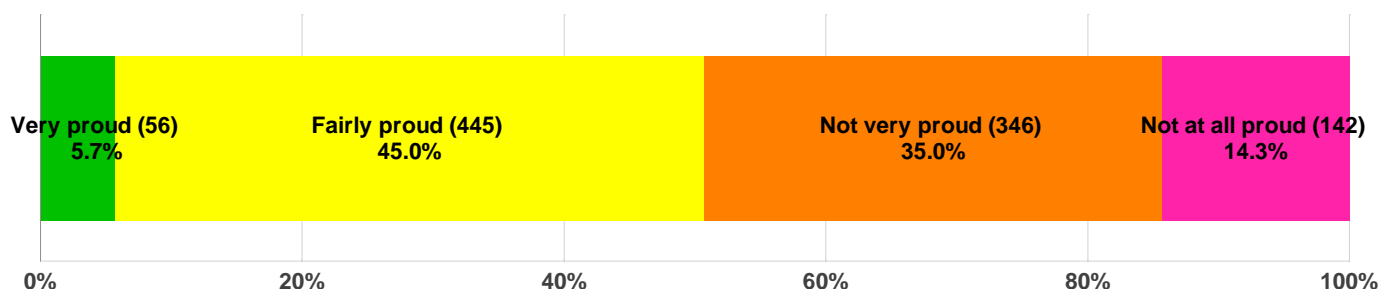
Demographic Differences

- Female respondents were significantly more satisfied with their local area as a place to live with 63.9% answering positively compared to 52.5% of male respondents answering the same.
- Respondents who have lived at their current address for more than ten years had lower proportions answering positively.

Pride in Maidstone Borough

The survey asked respondents: 'How proud are you of Maidstone Borough?', a total of 988 responded to this question.

Overall, 50.7% said they were either 'very proud' or 'fairly proud' of Maidstone Borough. The most common response was 'fairly proud' with 445 answering this way. In the last Budget Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2021, 50.4% of respondents answered positively. The change in the proportion responding positively compared to last year (0.3%) is considered negligible.



Demographic Differences

- Economically active respondents had a significantly greater proportion that answered positively with 54.8% answering this way compared to 43.2% of economically inactive respondents.
- Respondents with a disability had a significantly greater proportion that answered negatively with 61.8% answering this way compared to 46.2% of respondents without a disability.

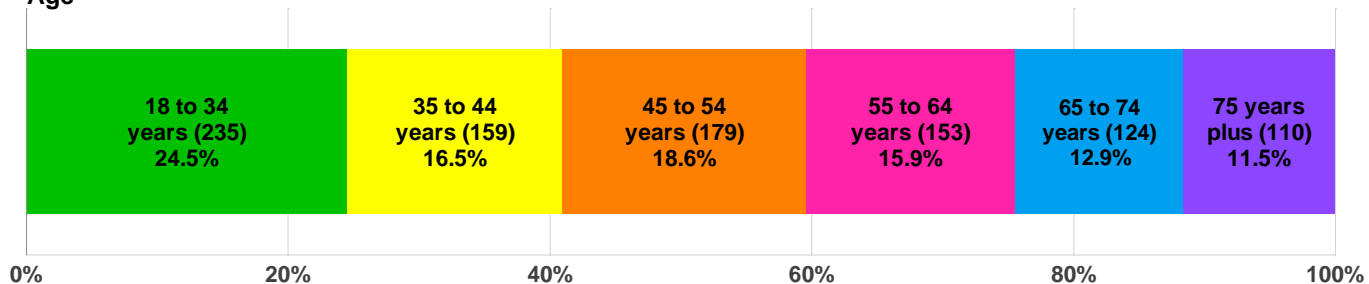
Budget Comments

Respondents to the survey were given the opportunity to make additional comments about the Council's budget and the funding of services. A total of 371 comments were received. These comments have been grouped into themes, with some comments containing multiple themes. The table below provides a summary of the comments for each of the top ten themes identified.

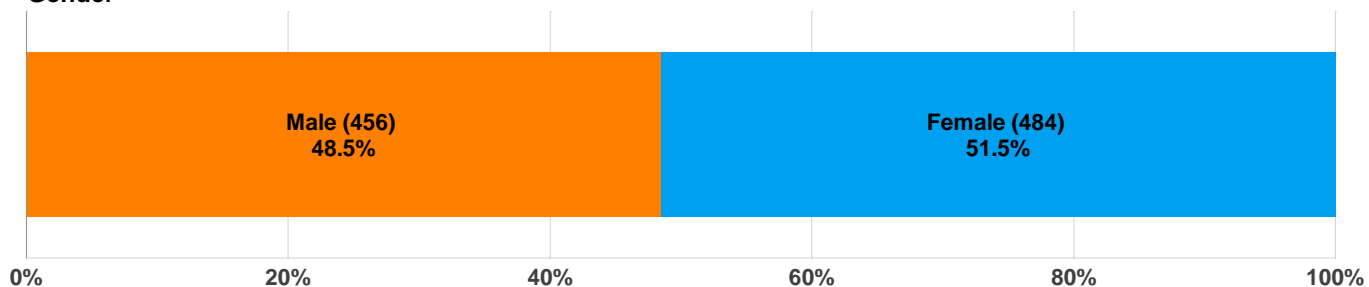
Theme	No.	Summary
Planning & Development (inc. infrastructure)	92	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop building new homes. • No infrastructure improvements to support growth. • Too much green space disappearing to new housing.
Roads & Traffic	66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions of roads. • Difficulty in getting from A to B due to congestion. • Speeding lorries, particularly in the rural communities.
VFM & Management Efficiencies	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not feel there is value for money from the amount of Council Tax paid (rural locations and suspension of services mentioned) • Spend money more wisely. • Don't spend money on 'vanity' projects. • Better contracts for services. • Cut managers and/or their salaries.
Crime, Safety & ASB	51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about levels of ASB. • Request for more CCTV. • Requests for more visible policing.
Town centre	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments that the Town centre was shabby, with empty shops and little to attract people. • Several mentioned feeling unsafe in the Town Centre. • Desire to see improvements in the Town Centre.
Cleanliness	46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements that cleanliness has deteriorated. • Increased litter and graffiti. • Requests for more litter bins.
The Environment & Waste Services	43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about disruption to waste collections. • Concerns about pollution (many in reference to traffic). • Perception that the Council is anti-nature.
Parking & Public Transport	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments about new developments without parking facilities. • Suggestions of cheaper or free town centre parking. • Disappointment about the removal of Park & Ride service. • Comments about inadequacy bus services.
Inward migration	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments about people moving to the Borough from other areas (many mentioned London boroughs moving their tenants to Maidstone) and the impact of population increase on local services.
Deliver Essentials & Maintain Services & Support the Vulnerable	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the essentials. • Ensure support is vulnerable for most vulnerable. • Maintain current services.
Attracting visitors & inward investment	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring support for local businesses. • Making Maidstone a place where people want to invest.

Demographics

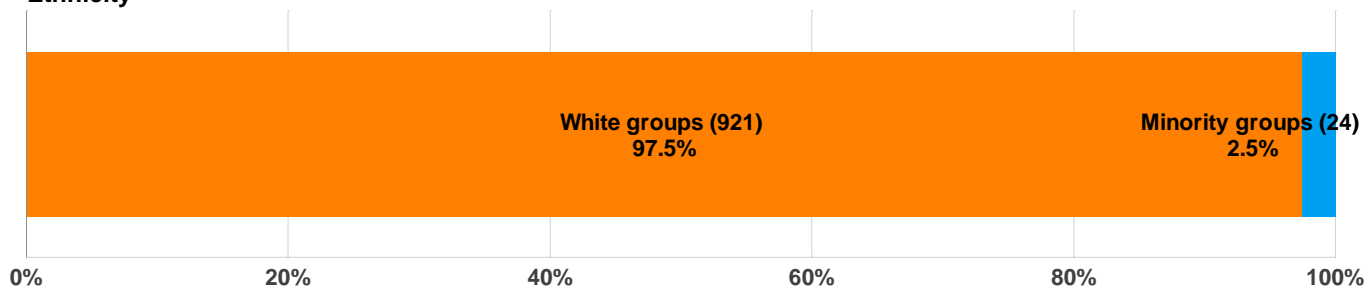
Age



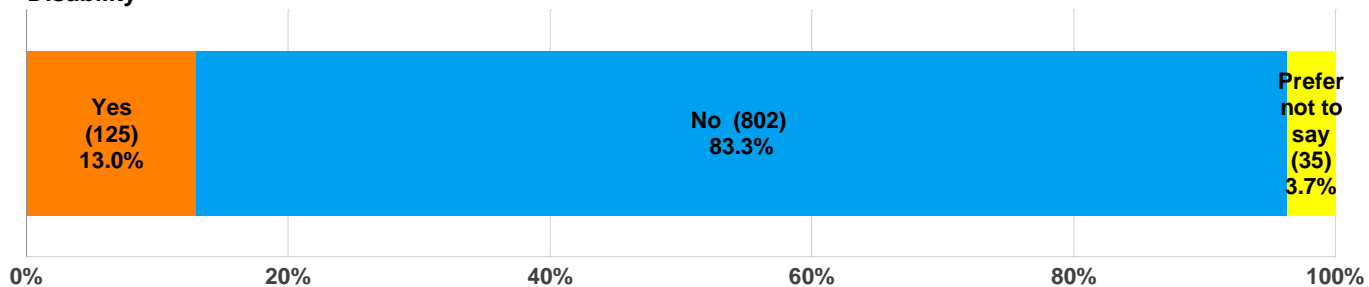
Gender



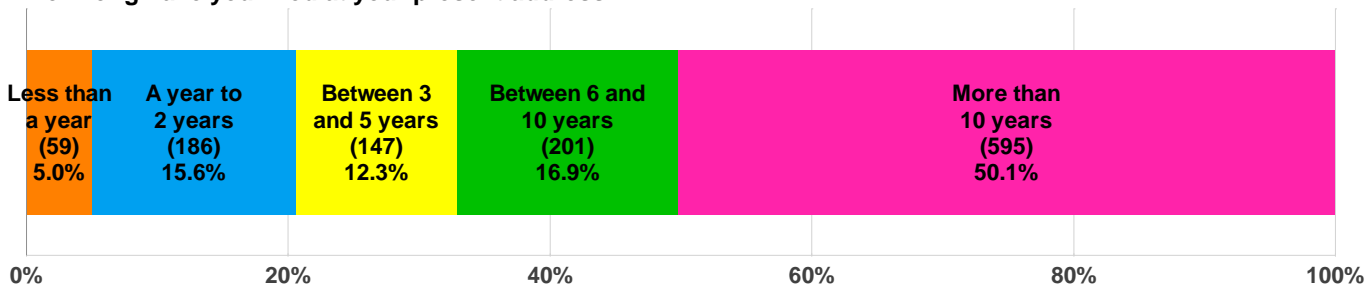
Ethnicity



Disability



How long have you lived at your present address?



COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE **17th January 2023**

Property Acquisition for 1,000 Affordable Homes programme

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	17 th January 2023
Executive	25 th January 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Shanaz Begum, Housing Acquisitions Consultant
Classification	<p>Public Report with Exempt Private Appendices</p> <p>The information contained within the Appendices has been considered exempt under the following paragraph of part 1 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:-</p> <p>3 = Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)</p> <p>Public Interest Test</p> <p>On applying the public interest test, the public interest in non- disclosure of the appendices to the report outweighs the public interest in</p>

	disclosing this information. The reasons in favour of disclosure are the public interest in ensuring value for money and the reasons against disclosure are the harm to the Council's financial position in respect of a commercial transaction. Any disclosure of such information may compromise the negotiating position of the Council. Keeping the information exempt is therefore in the public interest.
Wards affected	Staplehurst

<p>Executive Summary</p> <p>The development strategy to deliver 1,000 new affordable homes was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee on 19th January 2022. As part of the agreed strategy there is an expectation that 50% of affordable homes delivered will be from non-council owned sites.</p> <p>To support this programme an opportunity has arisen to purchase a site with outline permission submitted, for 10 apartments consisting of 2 x 1 beds and 5 x 2 beds, 3 x 3 beds and commercial space at ground floor .</p> <p>Once built the apartments will be let at Affordable Rent, with rents set at 80% of prevailing market rent, but capped at Local Housing Allowance.</p> <p>The committee is being asked to recommend the approval of the purchase of the freehold interest of the site before being passed to the Executive to approve the purchase of the proposed freehold acquisition. The site is tenanted with a 5-year agreement, at a passing rent of £9,000 per annum. A mutual break clause is in place with a 6-month notice period.</p>
<p>Purpose of Report</p> <p>Decision</p>

<p>This report makes the following recommendations to the Committee:</p> <p>That the Executive be recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree that the financial returns for the proposed acquisition as shown in Appendix 1, which is part 2 of the report, which support the Housing Development and Regeneration Investment Plan and the overall Development Strategy are approved. 2. Agree that the Director of Finance, Resources and Business improvement is granted delegated authority to:

- a) Negotiate terms for the purchase of the site, for the sum as shown in the Exempt Appendix 1 of this report.
 - b) Procure and enter into all such deeds, agreements, contracts, and documents which may be required to facilitate the purchase of the site and the subsequent redevelopment works required to deliver the scheme referred to in this report. Including (but not limited to) any related appointments such as suitably qualified consultants and Contractor.
3. Subject to satisfactory conclusion of all due diligence to negotiate and finalise and complete all legal formalities, deeds and agreements which may be required to facilitate the purchase. Agree that the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is authorised to appoint the solicitors required to negotiate and complete the necessary contract documentation, deeds and agreements associated with the purchase and construction works on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement.
 4. Agree that post completion of the procurement process to employ the necessary consultants to progress the planning application. To appoint a contractor to bring forward for approval to this Committee a detailed project delivery and investment plan (prior to the development itself commencing)

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
CHE PAC Committee	17 th January 2023
Executive	25 th January 2023

Property Acquisition for the 1,000 Affordable Homes programme

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The purchase of the homes described in this report supports the Councils Development Strategic plan in building 1,000 Affordable Homes, within the agreed capital spend of 200m.</p> <p>The report recommendations support all four of these.</p>	<p>Director of Regeneration and Place</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievement of the Deprivation and Social Mobility is improved cross cutting objective by delivering a high-quality development of affordable homes.</p>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>

Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to paragraph 5 of the report 	Director of Regeneration & Place
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost of acquiring the site as described in the report will be met from the 1,000 Affordable Homes capital budget agreed by the Council on 23rd February 2022. The projected return from the investment meets the criteria set out in the Council’s capital strategy. A financial summary is provided in Appendix 1. 	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. However, we will employ external consultants to help facilitate and oversee the redevelopment works with the appointed contractor 	William Cornall Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBC has statutory power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that individuals generally may do and under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 MBC has power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions. • S120(1)(2) of the 1972 Act also enables MBC to acquire land to be used for the benefit, improvement or development of their area or for the purpose of discharging MBC’s functions. • MBC must follow its internal 	Robin Harris Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)

	<p>procurement rules as detailed in the Constitution and comply with all legal requirements as may be applicable from time to time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting on the recommendations is within MBC's powers as set out in the above statutory provisions. 	
Information Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes. 	Lauren Connett Information Governance Team
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment 	Nicola Toulson Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals. 	Phillip Morris – Head of New Business
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder. 	Phillip Morris- Head of New Business
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On accepting the recommendations, MBC will then follow procurement exercises for commissioning consultancy advice to complete delivery of the scheme. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules. 	Phillip Morris- Head of New Business
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing 1,000 new affordable homes will have a significant impact on the Council's carbon footprint and 2030 Net Zero commitment. Highly thermally efficient, low carbon heating, and climate adapted housing, as well as consideration for shared heating solutions, renewable energy, active travel, and biodiversity enhancements as part of the 	James Wilderspin Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

	development strategy will ensure alignment with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.	
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 An outline planning application was submitted for a potential development site by a third party in 2021 for 2 x2beds, 5x2beds, 3x 3beds and class E commercial scheme at ground floor level. The decision is pending.
- 2.2 The Council now proposes to acquire the site and deliver the development. The proposed acquisition will provide 10 apartments and commercial space, subject to planning. The application drawings are shown in Exempt Appendix 2.
- 2.3 The proposed site will be acquired with an existing tenant in occupation, with the benefit of a 5-year lease agreement starting in 2021. The agreement includes a mutual break clause on six months' notice at any time.
- 2.4 On advice from the legal team, notice will be served to the existing tenants in order to obtain vacant possession of premises, at the appropriate time.
- 2.5 It is proposed the development will be delivered as 100% affordable housing. There are 10 proposed car park spaces and the scheme will be designed to national space standards.
- 2.6 The Council's offer for the proposed acquisition for the freehold of the site has been accepted (subject to committee approval, satisfactory contract, surveys and RICS valuation). The offer is based on a market valuation.
- 2.7 The offer is subject to an overage clause of £35,000 per flat, if the scheme is consented for more than 10 flats, not including the commercial space on the ground floor, within 20 years of the acquisition. We are confident due to planning constraints; we do not anticipate additional units.
- 2.8 A full schedule of accommodation along with the estimated market rent per unit, per calendar month (PCM) and subsequent total gross market rent per unit, per annum is summarised below:

Accommodation	Unit Totals	Unit Size Sq ft	Market Rent per unit (PCM)	Total Gross Rent per unit (PA) capped at LHA rates
1bed2p flat	2	570	£750	£6,979
2bed4p flat	2	764	£875	£8,638
2bed4p flat	3	872	£875	£8,638
3bed5p flat	3	928	£1,025	£9,698
commercial	1	3,100	£1,437	£75,000
Total	11			

All affordable housing will be let as Affordable Rented homes with rents set at 80% of market rent but capped at the local housing allowance as shown in table above. The homes will be let for Affordable Rented Housing to households on the Councils Housing register in accordance with allocations scheme policy.

Financial Return and Commitments

- 2.8.1 The total Gross Rent for the scheme and subsequent total Net rent for the scheme after the deduction of allowance (before inflation and interest) is £81,924 and £71,347 respectively. The part 2 Appendix 1 shows the relevant financial scheme summary.
- 2.8.2 The overall returns are reasonable, especially in terms of affordable housing. However, the costs ratio is significantly above the required level mainly due to the unprecedented increase in build costs seen recently in the Southeast.
- 2.8.3 It is anticipated that part of the Total Scheme Cost will be funded by MBC applying for grant from Homes England as part of the Continuous Market Engagement bid process for the Affordable Homes programme 2021-2026. The remainder of the Total Scheme Cost would be funded from the existing approved capital programme to support the delivery of affordable housing.
- 2.8.4 The acquisition is financially viable and meets the Council's minimum internal financial parameters. It will provide much needed affordable homes in the area.
- 2.8.5 These properties will be managed by MBC Housing Management Team, which is within the Housing and Community Services Department. The team will be responsible for all tenant contact including repairs, voids, maintenance compliance and rent management.

2.9 Proposed Delivery Timescale:

- 2.9.1 Details of the proposed delivery timescale are given below. The dates should be regarded as indicative at this stage as the Council may need to extend/amend the timetable as necessary.

Acquisition completion	February 2023
Planning consent	August 2023
Start on site	November 2023
Practical completion	November 2024

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 **Option 1:** The Committee recommends for approval the purchase of the proposed acquisition. On approval of planning consent to professional consultants and a contractor will be procured to deliver the scheme. This site when built would assist with housing provision for single person and families in need of affordable housing, contributing towards delivering the development strategy of 1,000 affordable homes.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** The Committee could choose not to recommend to the Executive the approval of the purchase of the proposed acquisition. The Council would however lose an excellent opportunity to purchase a site close to public transport and other amenities to add to its affordable housing stock. It will assist towards much needed accommodation in the Borough and contribute towards the Council's target of 1,000 Affordable homes.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 **Option 1** is the recommended option. A significant amount of work and negotiation has been completed by the officers to reach this accepted offer stage with the owners. The scheme has a good chance of being granted consent, with some modifications and liaison with the planning department. It represents a good investment opportunity which supports the 1,000 Affordable Homes Strategy. It also offers the opportunity to work with the owners who have several other small sites within the Borough, that could yield more opportunities in the future.
-

5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal is the increase in build costs since the start of the pandemic and recent inflationary pressures. Due to supply chains and shortage of labour construction costs have risen. Initial costings have been provided by Calfordseadon. The scheme is of a size to attract the smaller contractors, who have less overheads and can be competitive with pricing.
- 5.2 Officers will monitor the viability, as build costs remain turbulent. Therefore, post-consent, officers will monitor local rental values and demand. Upon completion of planning consent, there will be a procurement process to appoint the contractor. Officers will forward for approval to this Committee a detailed project delivery and investment plan (prior to the development itself commencing).
- 5.3 The appraisal has assumed some subsidy from Homes England. The housing will be 100% affordable rent on site. The chances of securing grant are much improved by MBC having acquired the site.
-

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Previous committee feedback has expressed the desire for MBC to acquire potential housing led sites within the Maidstone Borough to deliver housing for social housing purposes for the benefit of the local community. This proposal achieves that intention.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The next steps, subject to the decision made by the Executive, will be to secure the site with exchange and completion of contracts on the terms as

agreed by the Director of Finance, Resources and Business improvement, subject to RICS valuation and satisfactory contract. Alongside the acquisition, officers will work alongside planning consultants to ensure a satisfactory consent. Once consent is received officers will work with appointed Employer's agents to source a suitable contractor within a deliverable price. And will return to Committee with recommendation for the contractor to be appointed and confirmed costs for the build.

- 7.2 The Head of Mid Kent Legal Services will also be authorised to instruct/appoint the Solicitors to complete the necessary contract documentation, deeds and contracts associated with the purchase.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Exempt Appendix 1: Site Layout
 - Exempt Appendix 2: Financial Summary
-

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

17th January 2023

Property Acquisition for 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee	17 th January 2023
Executive	25 th January 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Executive
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall – Director of Regeneration & Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Philip Morris – Housing Acquisitions Consultant
Classification	<p>Public Report with Exempt Private Appendices</p> <p>The information contained within the Appendices has been considered exempt under the following paragraph of part 1 of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:-</p> <p>3 = Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)</p> <p>Public Interest Test</p> <p>On applying the public interest test, the public interest in non- disclosure of the appendices to the report outweighs the public interest in disclosing this information. The reasons in favour of disclosure are the public interest in ensuring value for money and the reasons against disclosure are the harm to the Council’s financial position in respect of a commercial transaction. Any disclosure of</p>

	such information may compromise the negotiating position of the Council. Keeping the information exempt is therefore in the public interest.
Wards affected	Bridge Ward

Executive Summary

The development strategy to deliver 1,000 new affordable homes was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee on 19th January 2022. As part of the agreed strategy, there is an expectation that 50% of affordable homes delivered will be from non-council owned urban brownfield sites.

As part of this programme an opportunity to purchase a town centre site has arisen. The site has an existing planning permission in place for the development of 19 residential units to include 6 x 1 beds and 13 x 2 bed apartments along with associated parking and landscaping.

Once built it is the intention to let the units as Affordable rent units set at 80% of market rent and capped at Local Housing Allowance levels.

The Committee is being asked to consider the freehold acquisition of the site, before being passed to the Executive to approve the purchase of the proposed freehold acquisition.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to the Committee

That the Executive be recommended to:

1. Approve the financial returns for the proposed acquisition as shown in Exempt Appendix 2 of this report, which supports the Housing Development and Regeneration Investment Plan and overall Development Strategy.
2. Agree that the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement is granted delegated authority to:
 - a) Negotiate terms for the purchase of the proposed acquisition for the sum as shown in the Exempt Appendix 2 of this report.
 - b) Procure and enter into all such deeds, agreements, contracts and documents which may be required to facilitate the purchase of the site, and the subsequent redevelopment works required to deliver the scheme referred to in this report. Including (but not limited to)

any related appointments such as a suitably qualified consultants and Contractor.

- c) Subject to satisfactory conclusion of all due diligence to negotiate and finalise and complete all legal formalities, deeds and agreements which may be required to facilitate the purchase.

3. Agree that the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is authorised to appoint Solicitors to negotiate and complete the necessary contract documentation, deeds and agreements associated with the purchase and construction works on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance, Recourses & Business Improvement.

4. Agree that Post completion of the procurement process to appoint a contractor to bring forward for approval a detailed project delivery and investment plan (prior to the development itself commencing).

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
CHE PAC Committee	17 th January 2023
Executive	25 th January 2023

Property Acquisition

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The purchase of the homes described in this report supports the Councils Development Strategic plan in building 1,000 Affordable Homes, within the agreed capital spend of 200m.</p> <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council’s ability to achieve and support Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure and Homes and Communities.</p>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendations support the achievement of the Deprivation and Social Mobility is improved cross cutting objective by delivering a high-quality development of affordable homes.</p>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>
<p>Risk Management</p>	<p>Already covered in the risk section.</p>	<p>Director of Regeneration & Place</p>

Financial	Development of the site is not currently included in the draft capital programme, with monies allocated for indicative schemes. This scheme would therefore draw upon those resources already allocated, subject to the risks set out in this report and to the initiatives described in the report to close any potential viability gap.	Adrian Lovegrove and Paul Holland-Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. However, we will employ external consultants to help facilitate and oversee the redevelopment works with the appointed contractor.	Director of Regeneration & Place
Legal	<p>MBC has statutory power under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that individuals generally may do and under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 MBC has power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions.</p> <p>S120(1)(2) of the 1972 Act also enables MBC to acquire land to be used for the benefit, improvement or development of their area or for the purpose of discharging MBC's functions.</p> <p>MBC must follow its internal procurement rules as detailed in the Constitution and comply with all legal requirements as may be applicable from time to time.</p> <p>Acting on the recommendations is within MBC's powers as set out in the above statutory provisions.</p>	Rob Harris (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact the personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act	Lauren Connett-Policy and

	2018) that the Council processes.	Information Team
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Nicola Toulson-Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals.	Philip Morris -Head of New Business
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Philip Morris -Head of New Business
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, MBC will then follow procurement exercises for commissioning consultancy advice to secure the works contract. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Philip Morris -Head of New Business
Biodiversity and Climate change	Providing 1,000 new affordable homes will have a significant impact on the Council's carbon footprint and 2030 Net Zero commitment. Highly thermally efficient, low carbon heating, and climate adapted housing, as well as consideration for shared heating solutions, renewable energy, active travel, and biodiversity enhancements as part of the development strategy will ensure alignment with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.	James Wilderspin-Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 As covered under the planning section an application was submitted by the vendor in 2020 and subsequently approved in 2021 to build 19 residential units to include 6 x 1 beds and 13 x 2 bed apartments together with associated car parking, cycle storage and landscaping.

2.2 The site lies on the western edge of the Town centres close to Maidstone West Railway station. The site is considered a highly sustainable location with good access by foot and cycle to a number of services in close proximity.

There are also a high number of easily accessible bus services just a short walk from the site.

- 2.3 The surrounding area is a mix of uses, including commercial, retail, leisure, healthcare and residential. The site itself is relatively small at circa 0.12 ha and currently comprised of a retail store at ground level with fitness use at first floor and to the rear. All tenants have now vacated the premises. A surface car park is located to the west of the site which provides parking for around 29-30 cars in unmarked bays, used for staff and customers and is accessed directly off Tonbridge Road. At this point the carriageway is one way westbound.
- 2.4 The proposal seeks to demolish the existing site and provide a part 3/4 storey building providing 19 apartments with 14 car parking spaces, two of which will be electric vehicle charging spaces. The development will benefit from the use of photovoltaic panels which will be fitted to the roof. There are 20 Cycle parking spaces proposed with secure storage area. Six of the two bed units have access to private amenity space in the form of balconies although the remaining units do not. An offsite contribution towards improvements to existing open space has been secured through the S106. The planning site layout for this development is shown at Exempt Appendix 1.
- 2.5 The existing planning permission for the site has no requirement for the provision of affordable homes. The S106 does contain a viability review mechanism which is to be carried out during construction and prior to completion of the 2nd floor slab. This review mechanism will determine if any affordable homes can be delivered on site or a commuted sum payment required.
- 2.6 It is proposed the development will be delivered as 100% affordable housing, comprising of affordable rent. Also contained within the S106 is a maximum threshold of affordable units to be delivered on site which is only 6 units. This is not in line with our proposals as outlined above. We are therefore intending to seek a deed of variation to remove this cap on the number of affordable homes being delivered on site.
- 2.7 Should the deed of variation not be obtained then the fallback position would be to proceed with the purchase and deliver 14 market rented units and 5 affordable rented units (all located on a separate floor to the market rented units) which would be allowed under the existing planning permission and S106. The scheme has been designed to national space standards. The homes will be built to MBC standard specification for Affordable Rent.
- 2.8 The Council's offer for the proposed acquisition for the freehold of the site has been accepted (subject to committee approval, satisfactory contract, and RIC's Valuation). The offer was based on a desktop valuation based on Market Sales values and Market rents in the area.

Plot	Accommodation	Unit Size		Market Rent PCM	Total Gross Rent per unit /per annum capped at LHA rates	Mixed Tenure Gross Rents
		M2	Sq Ft			
1	1B2P	50	538	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 7,850
2	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 9,843
3	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 9,843
4	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 9,843
5	1B2P	50	538	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 7,850
6	1B2P	50	538	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 8,400
7	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
8	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
9	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
10	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
11	1B2P	50	538	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 8,400
12	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
13	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
14	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
15	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
16	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
17	2b4P	70	753	£ 900	£ 9,843	£ 10,800
18	1B2P	54	581	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 8,400
19	1B2P	54	581	£ 700	£ 7,850	£ 8,400
Totals		1218	13111	£ 190,800	£ 175,063	£ 186,830

2.9 A full schedule of accommodation along with the estimated market rent per unit, per calendar month (PCM) and subsequent total gross rent per unit, per annum (PA) capped at Local Housing Allowance Levels, is summarised below:

2.10 All the affordable housing will be let as Affordable Rented Homes with rents set at 80% of market rent but capped at the local housing allowance levels as shown in table above. The homes will be let to households on the Councils Housing register in accordance with allocations scheme policy.

2.11 The Council have recently concluded the procurement process to appoint suitably experienced and qualified companies to carry out a number of professional specialist consultancy services to support our ambitious housebuilding programme. Part of these specialist services comprise of Employers Agent, Cost Consultancy, Principal Designer and Clerk of Works all of which will be required for this project. The Council will therefore utilise the services of the appointed consultancy firm (Calfordseaden) for these areas of works.

Financial Returns and Commitments

2.12 Option 1 -All Affordable Rent

For the all affordable rent option the total Gross Rent for the Scheme and subsequent total Net rent for the scheme after the deduction of allowance (before inflation and interest) is £175,063 and £161,419 respectively. Exempt Appendix 2 shows the relevant scheme financial summary.

2.13 The overall returns are reasonable, especially in terms of affordable housing. However, the costs ratio is above the required level mainly due to the unprecedented increase in build costs seen recently in the Southeast which has been seen on a number of site appraisals recently.

2.14 It is proposed the part of the total scheme Costs (£5,408,753) will be funded with £950,000 coming from Homes England grant funding through continuous market engagement bid process for the affordable homes programme 2021-2026, and a sum of £304,000 from the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF).The remaining estimated total works cost would be funded from the existing approved capital programme to support delivery of affordable housing. This would provide a TSC /MVS of 103.9% after deduction of the BLRF monies from the works costs.

2.15 The acquisition is financially viable and meets the Councils minimum internal financial parameters. It will provide much needed high quality affordable homes in the area.

2.16 These properties will be managed by MBC Housing Management Team, which is within the Housing and Community Services Department. The team will be responsible for all tenant contacts including repairs, voids, maintenance compliance and rent management.

- 2.17 Option 2- 14 Market Rent and 5 Affordable Rent Units
For the mixed tenure option, the total Gross Rent for the Scheme and subsequent total Net rent for the scheme after the deduction of allowance (before inflation and interest) is £186,830 and £181,134 respectively. Exempt Appendix 3 shows the relevant scheme financial summary.
- 2.18 The Council is in receipt of off-site s106 contributions for use towards the provision of affordable housing. It is proposed that part of the Total Scheme Cost (£5,500,493) will be funded with £225,000 coming from the aforementioned off-site contributions pool of monies and a sum of £304,000 from the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF). The remainder of the estimated Total Scheme Cost would be funded from the existing approved capital programme to support the delivery of affordable housing. This would provide a TSC /MVS of 105.7% after deduction of the BLRF monies from the works costs.
- 2.19 The acquisition is financially viable and meets the Councils minimum internal financial parameters. It will provide 5 much needed high quality affordable homes and add to Maidstone Councils existing PRS stock in the area.
- 2.20 These properties will be managed by MBC Housing Management Team, which is within the Housing and Community Services Department. The team will be responsible for all tenant contacts including repairs, voids, maintenance compliance and rent management.

Proposed Delivery Timescale

- 2.21 Details of the proposed delivery timescale are given below. The dates should be regarded as indicative at this stage as the Council may need to extend and /or amend the timetable as necessary

Activity	Finish Date
Exchange and Completion of Contracts	February 2023
Procurement of Contractor	April 2023
Start On Site	September 2023
Practical Completion	April 2024

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 **Option 1:** The Committee could choose not to recommend the approval of the purchase of the proposed acquisition to the Executive. The Council would however lose an excellent opportunity to purchase a site with full planning permission with access to good transport links and amenities to add to its affordable housing stock. It will assist towards much needed affordable accommodation in the Borough and contribute towards the Council 1,000 Affordable Homes delivery target.

- 3.2 **Option 2:** The Committee recommends to the Executive that the purchase of the proposed acquisition is approved on the agreed terms and procures the professional consultants and Contractor to help deliver the scheme. This site when built would assist with affordable housing provision, contributing towards delivering the 1,000 affordable homes target.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Option 2 is the recommended option. A significant amount of work and negotiation has been completed by officers to reach this accepted offer stage with the vendor. The scheme has full planning consent on purchase and represents a good investment opportunity which supports the 1,000 Affordable Homes Development Strategy.
- 4.2 The acquisition will also deliver 19 new apartments within a residential location, making a valuable contribution to the borough's identified affordable housing need.
- 4.3 Should MBC fail to secure the deed of variation required to allow the site to be delivered as 100% affordable it is recommended the site still be acquired and delivered as a mixed tenure scheme providing 14 market rent units and 5 affordable rent units which is in line with the existing planning permission and would not require any variation to the S106 agreement.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal is the increase in build costs since the start of the pandemic. Due to supply chains and shortage of labour construction costs have risen. The BCIS which provides cost and price data for the UK construction Industry, is forecasting with the initial rise in January, prices will ease off slightly. Initial costings have been provided by Calfords Seaden based on similar schemes. The scheme is of a size to attract the smaller contractors, who will have less overheads and can be competitive with pricing.
- 5.2 Officers will continue to monitor the viability, as build costs remain turbulent. Therefore, post-acquisition, officers will monitor local rental values and demand. Upon completion of the procurement process to appoint a contractor, Officers will bring forward for approval to this Committee a detailed project delivery and investment plan (prior to the development itself commencing).
- 5.3 The appraisal has assumed some subsidy from Homes England. The housing will be 100% affordable rent on site. There is a restriction within the S106 regarding a maximum number of affordable homes to be delivered on site and so officers will need to obtain a deed of variation to agree this. MBC will be seeking grant from Homes England for the affordable rented provision. The chances of securing such grant funding are much improved by MBC having acquired the site with secured Full Planning Consent. If the grant is not forthcoming or officers are unable to agree the deed of

variation, the homes could be provided for PRS housing through Maidstone Property Holdings Limited. A smaller number of affordable rented units could also be provided, all located on one separate floor, which would be consistent with the current planning consent, so this risk can be mitigated.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Previous committee feedback has expressed the desire for MBC to acquire potential housing led sites within the Maidstone borough to deliver housing for social housing purposes for the benefit of the local community. This proposal achieves that intention.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The next steps, subject to the decision made by the Executive, will be to secure the site with exchange and completion of contracts on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement, subject to RICS valuation, and satisfactory contract. Alongside the acquisition, officers will work with the appointed Employers Agent to source a suitable contractor within a deliverable price and will return to Committee with recommendation for the Contractor to be appointed and confirmed costs for build.
- 7.2 The Head of Mid Kent Legal Services will also be authorised to instruct/appoint the Solicitors to complete the necessary contract documentation, deeds and contracts associated with the purchase.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Exempt Appendix 1: Site Layout
 - Exempt Appendix 2: Financial Summary Option 1
 - Exempt Appendix 3: Financial Summary Option 2
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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