

**Maidstone Council's Approach to Recovery from Covid19 Pandemic**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

This report provides an overall summary of the proposed approach to the recovery phase to the Covid-19 pandemic for Maidstone Borough Council and the contribution that the council makes to recovery for communities and businesses across the Borough of Maidstone. It emphasises the importance of a safe, sustainable, managed recovery, sets out some overarching objectives and a proposed structure for the response phase of the crisis.

**Purpose of Report**

Decision

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That the Committee notes the context for Covid19 recovery
2. That the Committee consider and agree the objectives for Covid19 recovery for Maidstone

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy and Resources Committee	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2020

## Approach to Recovery from Covid19 Pandemic

### 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i></li> <li>• <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i></li> <li>• <i>Homes and Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>A Thriving Place</i></li> </ul> <p>The report supports delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan through the delivery of a safe, sustainable, managed recovery in both community and business community and for the borough council itself from the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic</p>	Chief Executive
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Heritage is Respected</i></li> <li>• <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i></li> <li>• <i>Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</i></li> <li>• <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i></li> </ul> <p>The report supports delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan through the delivery of a safe, sustainable, managed recovery in both community and business community and for the borough council itself from the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic</p>	Chief Executive
<b>Risk Management</b>	Already covered in the risk section of the report	Chief Executive

<b>Financial</b>	<p>This report sets out a proposed approach to the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic for Maidstone Borough Council. So far as possible, the actions set out in this report will be delivered within existing budgets. However, as set out in a report elsewhere on the agenda for 24<sup>th</sup> June, the Council faces very severe financial pressures in 2020/21 which may constrain its ability to deliver these actions.</p>	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	<p>We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.</p>	Chief Executive
<b>Legal</b>	<p>The objectives for Covid19 recovery for Maidstone outlined in paragraph 2 of this report are matters which the Council is permitted to undertake under the Functions Regulations and the Local Government Act 1972, section 111(1) which empowers the Council 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 their functions.</p> <p>The Responsibility for Functions outlined in part 2 of the Constitution enable decisions (arising from the objectives) to be made by Committees and/or delegated authority.</p> <p>The proposed objectives are being considered in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and are in accordance with the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and regulations introduced under the Act by the government.</p>	Head of Mid Kent Legal Partnership

	<p>The Regulations were made in response to the serious and imminent threat to public health which is posed by the incidence and spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in England - (The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020).</p> <p>The Regulations (as amended) specifically require the closure of businesses selling food or drink for consumption on the premises, and other businesses, to protect against the risks to public health arising from coronavirus, except for limited permitted uses. Various other businesses were permitted to remain open.</p> <p>The Regulations also prohibit anyone leaving the place where they live without reasonable excuse; and banned public gatherings of (initially) more than two people. The closures and restrictions have been varied by further regulations, The revised restrictions will last until they are further revised and/or terminated by a direction given by the Secretary of State.</p>	
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	<p>Personal information processed and held because of the council responding to Covid19 will be processed in accordance with the requirements of data protection legislation. The need for data privacy impact assessments to be undertaken will be kept under review.</p>	<p>Policy and Information Team</p>
<b>Equalities</b>	<p>Any changes to services proposed will be subject to equality considerations.</p>	<p>Policy &amp; Information Manager</p>
<b>Public Health</b>	<p>The proposed objectives are being considered in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis which has had and</p>	<p>Senior Public Health Officer</p>

	<p>will continue to have implications on the wider determinants of health. The outbreak of COVID-19 has shown health and work/business are inextricably linked. It has also further highlighted the health inequalities that already existed prior to the outbreak with particular groups within the population being at greater risk from COVID-19 as highlighted in the Public Health England report 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19' public in June 2020. The Council's recovery approach will need to consider these implications moving forwards.</p>	
<p><b>Crime and Disorder</b></p>	<p>The proposed recommendation will support crime and disorder reduction. The Community Protection Team is working in tandem with police and stakeholders to ensure the safe reopening of the Town Centre and other key shopping areas. Requests for assistance from those suffering from domestic abuse are expected to rise as recovery proceeds and services are being planned in order to respond to the increase.</p>	<p>Head of Housing &amp; Community Services</p>

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In 'typical' emergencies, local authorities and local resilience forums deal first with an emergency and then the recovery – getting back to 'business as usual' - for example, when the flood waters recede, work takes place to repair any damage and to get people back into their homes. The recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic will not follow this pattern. Given the scale of the Covid19 public health emergency and the social-economic shock plus the opportunities highlighted there will not be recovery to business as usual and recovery is likely to take a long time.
- 2.2 Recovering from Covid19 will require some form of reimagining of how we achieve our strategic plan vision, our objectives, our priorities, and our operating models for delivery of some of our services and how we work with others. This will involve short,

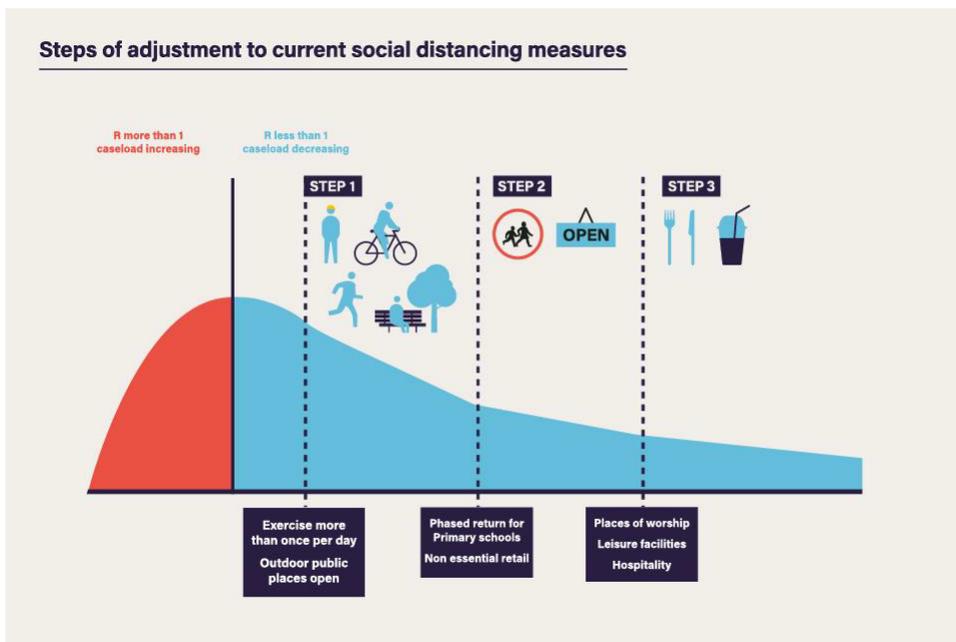
medium, and long-term political and policy choices for the council as well as multiple managerial decisions about the way we undertake recovery for our own organisation, through the services that we provide for the community and in our work with partners who also deliver services for the social, economic and environmental well-being of our borough.

- 2.3 Experience of the response phase has highlighted challenges and opportunities which in turn may have positive learning and consequences for the council. This will take place through our own organisational recovery arrangements and will also need to pay attention to the approach across the county and with our partners including any collective recovery effort through Kent Resilience Forum
- 2.4 As noted above recovery is usually a response to a specific, localised event not a fundamental restart of all aspects of social, economic, and civic life. It is possible that the response and recovery phases will need to run concurrently as there is a risk of further high levels of Covid19 transmission potentially leading to associated national or local lockdown. There are other ongoing resilience risks for Kent, particularly in the form of a 'no-deal' end to the Brexit transition period between the UK and EU. We may need to respond to other emergencies for example severe weather. Given the scale of the impact of COVID-19 including the financial impacts organisational recovery is likely to be a priority for several years
- 2.5 So – this is not a normal recovery and we have to be adaptable and agile given the risks, issues and challenges we continue to face. We need to take a strategic and evidence led approach to impact assessment and planning the recovery – identifying not only the challenges but also the opportunities that have arisen because of the Covid19 pandemic. We have collected information and performance data throughout which will help us – although we may need some analytics to be undertaken and impact for our residential and business communities will also take time to emerge.

#### National picture

- 2.6 The scale of the COVID-19 impact means that the Government strategy for recovery and the associated policy, legislation, guidance, and requirements for the role of local government etc are likely to evolve for some time. Experience to date is that expectations of our role are high, and communication has been somewhat chaotic arising in part from the pace and volume of initiatives.

2.7 On 10 May the Prime Minister set out the overarching approach for the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. That approach has been outlined in greater detail through a 50-page recovery strategy and through various additional documents setting out guidance for travel to work, educational settings, shielding vulnerable people and reactive measures to control infection, high street re-start guidance as well as a range of other issues. The guidance also contains a 'Covid alert level' system and a series of steps to lift the lockdown restrictions. It set out three steps with planning dates along with associated steps to lift restrictions – summarised below.



2.8 On 28 May, the Prime Minister announced that the Government's five tests for easing restrictions had been met and that, as a result, primary schools would open for some classes, secondary schools would start to provide some face-to-face contact for years 10 and 12, that outdoor retail and car showrooms could re-open from 1 June and other non-essential retailers from 15 June and that some restrictions on meeting people would be lifted with up to six people being able to meet in parks and private outdoor spaces. Further restrictions have been lifted including, most recently for access to places of worship for personal prayer. For each step there are implications for MBC as an organisation and the services that we provide. So, to some degree our recovery arrangements are being shaped by national requirements and timetables leading to operational decisions around how best to implement local arrangements and plans. Contemporaneously with this government departments are requiring data and plans which demonstrate the impact of Covid19 and our plans for recovery for example the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government have

required this for people accommodated in emergency accommodation as a result of Covid19.

### Maidstone Borough Council's Overarching Approach

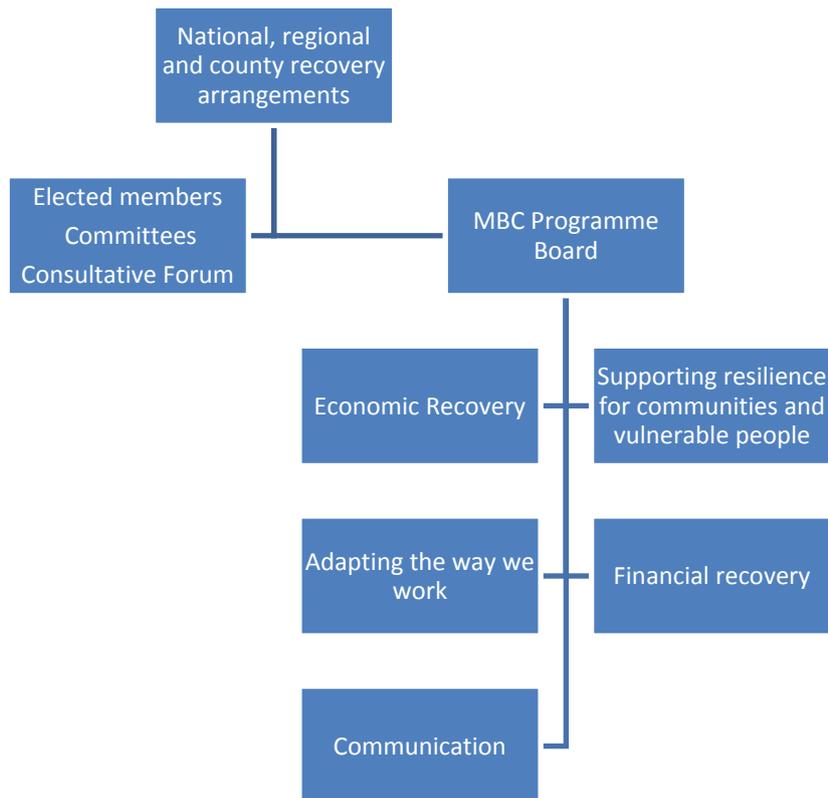
2.9 It is proposed that our aim should be to deliver a safe, sustainable, managed recovery. Set out below are some proposed objectives and a structure for the response phase.

2.10 The proposed objectives (in no particular order) are

- To support local businesses to return to successful operation and to survive the significant economic impacts of Covid19
- To support residents who have been affected by the pandemic and the restrictions placed upon them and to manage the impact including as protections and support mechanisms are eased and removed.
- To retain the capability to protect vulnerable people and to react to any move back into response mode if necessary.
- To maintain and prioritise where necessary the Council's services in line with government advice.
- To recognise and promote positive outcomes including reduced pollution and congestion, better work/life balance and community spirit
- To recognise that the Council needs to remain financially solvent and that, with government grant completely removed and Council Tax capped we are increasingly reliant on income generation and there remains the possibility of a tension between this and other objectives.
- To identify long term adverse and positive impacts arising from the Covid19 pandemic and pick these up through the regular review of MBC strategies for example housing, health and well-being and climate change
- To protect the health, safety and well-being of staff and councillors delivering essential public services to our residents and businesses.

2.11 Operationally the council is working according to programme management principles to deliver a recovery strategy and action plan and intends that this should be based on four themes – economic recovery, supporting resilience for communities and vulnerable people, adapting the way we work and financial recovery, has established a core group of officers led by the Chief Executive and has established a member covid19 recovery consultative forum chaired by the Leader of the Council which has the aims of:

- Providing advice and guidance to the MBC Project team for the public health emergency recovery project including:
  - i. Providing feedback on the impact of Covid19 for the resident and business communities in the borough.
  - ii. Providing feedback and suggestions for proposed actions for recovery ahead of these being sent to the relevant committees for decision making where this is required.
  - iii. Monitoring and assessment of recovery measures.
- Ensuring engagement with all councillors to identify the key challenges for recovery, including those issues which will need to be referred to or escalated with partner organisations;
- Supporting the council's committees in ensuring that there is continuous political strategic overview of the recovery phase including for cross-cutting issues.



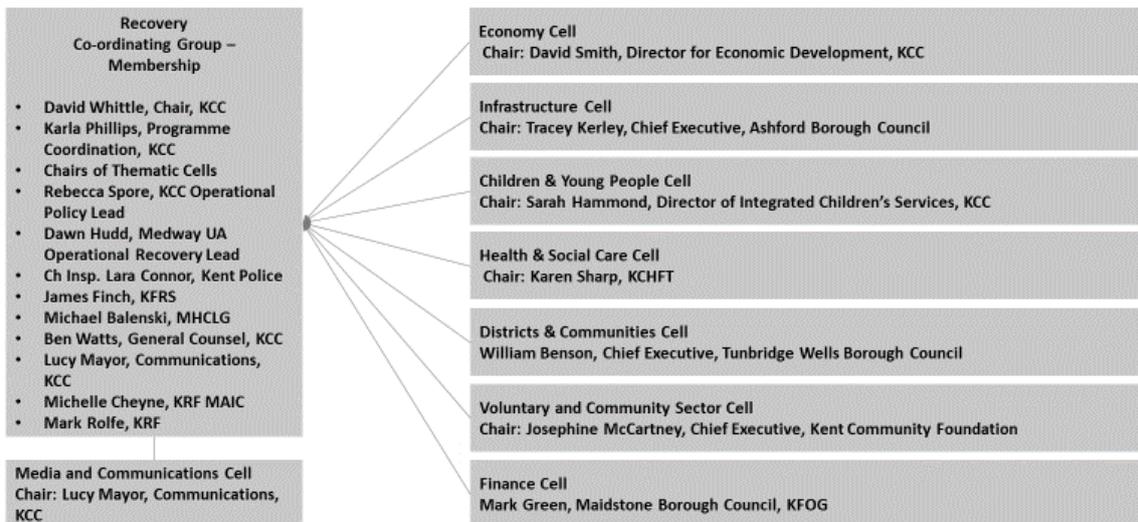
2.12 Regular reports will be made to the Policy and Resources Committee to enable strategic political oversight and to the relevant committee depending on any specific updates or political decision making required. Members will also be updated via the regular members' bulletin and can feed in issues and concerns via the member covid19 recovery consultative forum.

Kent and Medway arrangements – Kent Resilience Forum

2.13 MBC is operating within and coordinating its response with a county-wide recovery structure. A Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) has been set up within the Kent Resilience Forum based on national guidance and with expert advice being provided from the Kent Resilience Team.

2.14 This RCG is supported by seven recovery 'cells'. The Council is directly involved in some of these cells (economy, districts and communities and finance plus the reference group for health and social care) and indirectly involved in others through regular reports to the RCG, Kent Leaders and Chief Executives and county-wide professional officer groupings. Details of this structure are set out below.

## Recovery Co-ordinating Group Structure



2.15 Each 'cell' is in the process of producing an impact assessment which sets out the impact of the pandemic on the area of focus, strengths, risks, weaknesses and opportunities that have been identified through the response phase and into the recovery phase and a prioritised list of impacts and activity. The RCG enables key themes to be drawn out from the work of the various cells and it also works in collaboration with other recovery groups from across the South East to ensure that we can learn from best practice and collaboratively press on key issues with central government. Cross cutting issues are also being identified. The key one to date is the impact in terms of household financial hardship; a task and finish group has been set up on the topic and MBC will input and able to contribute in particular given our experience of predictive analytics working with EY/Xantura (on homelessness risk factors) and evidence based assessment of households in financial difficulty through work with Policy in Practice which was commissioned following a decision of this committee in February 2020. We intend that a report on the outcomes from the Policy in Practice analytics (which has been undertaken for February i.e. before the pandemic and mid-May i.e. during the pandemic) will be presented to this committee in July 2020.

### First steps to recovery

2.16 High Street Re-start is a current key area of focus because of the re-opening of non-essential retail from 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020. In terms of preparation for Maidstone town centre MBC is applying government guidance and working with the Business Improvement District, KCC

and Kent Police to ensure that the retailers are engaged and that there is a co-ordinated approach to managing the public areas including in Week Street, King Street and Earl Street. A booklet detailing extensive advice and where to find support has been prepared for retailers. Officers have also contacted parish councils and MBC councillors so that any matters relating to other high streets and shopping parades can be identified and addressed. The government has provided funding on a per capita basis; MBC has received £153k to support high streets over the next 12 months.

- 2.17 Amongst other things MBC will ensure that infrastructure in the town centre including signage, marking of queuing zones, relocation of and additional street furniture and information is implemented, our environmental health team will assist smaller independent retailers with risk assessments for their premises where needed and our community protection team will be working with street ambassadors and Kent Police to ensure a presence in the town centre to assist the public and retailers – engaging, explaining and encouraging people to abide by the social distancing guidance. Given the attraction of our town centre we have ensured that a high footfall plan is in place. Our car parks will be available with contactless and Ringo payment options. A One Team briefing, and monitoring system has also been established to ensure co-ordination of information, intelligence, and deployment of staff.
- 2.18 On 9 May 2020, the Government announced a £250m 'emergency active-travel fund' to design and implement 'pop-up' and temporary interventions to create an environment that is safe for walking and cycling, to help maintain social distancing and avoid overcrowding on public transport systems. Details of the funding were subsequently announced on 27 May 2020 skewed towards areas with high levels of public transport use and with a clear view that the funding should be used to meaningfully alter the status quo with work starting within four weeks of receiving funding and being complete within eight weeks. Kent County Council has received £8m of which 20 per cent (£1.6m) is to be allocated in the first instance. Bids needed to be received by Friday 5 June. KCC has emphasised that it will follow the guidance and be guided by the ability of local authorities to deliver the schemes put forward (and to support them with capacity to deliver it) and by whether or not the schemes are supported locally.
- 2.19 Given the timescales potential schemes were discussed with the councillors who are on the Maidstone Strategic Infrastructure Group and guided by this discussion and discussion with the KCC local schemes team MBC submitted two proposals both of which already had endorsement through previous political decision making. These are:

- i. Provision of a temporary cycle lane and pavement widening, as and where appropriate and technically viable, along King's Street from the A249 to the junction with Wyke Manor Road. This measure is supported in the Maidstone Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) objective HTTC15.
- ii. Pedestrianisation of Earl Street, between Pudding Lane and Week Street, using an Experimental TRO to limit vehicle movements in a way consistent with the existing Week Street TRO. This would allow for deliveries and servicing but the road would be pedestrianised from just east of the taxi parking bays on Earl St between certain hours to enable social distancing and potentially support the use of the footways by the restaurant businesses along Earl Street. This pedestrianisation has long been in our public realm plans for the town centre as our next phase (following Jubilee and Remembrance Squares and subsequently Week Street and Gabriel's Hill). If agreed by KCC the experimental TRO would allow consultation on the effects of the pedestrianisation and help us in any future decision making. This measure is supported in the Maidstone IDP objective HTTC6.

2.20 We have also considered other town centre locations where footway widening would be helpful on a temporary basis (which of course would also give us the opportunity to assess whether a permanent change would work well). The following roads seem most suitable, based on our discussion:

- Church Street, from Union Street to Wyke Manor Road.
- Union Street, from Week Street to the junction with Church Street.
- Brewer Street, from the Brewer Street car park to Week Street.

2.21 The focus of the Council's work on Community issues to date has been on the establishment of a 'Community Hub' and support to benefit claimants. As we move to recovery, there will be a continued need to support shielded, vulnerable and isolated residents, a potential requirement to support those isolating as a result of the test and trace programme, address and respond to the impact of the pandemic and associated lockdown on issues such as domestic abuse, mental health, unemployment and managing the removal of protections (eg on actions such as evictions, debt recovery). There will clearly be a longer-term impact on inequality (education, health, financial, digital).

- 2.22 Other issues to be explored as part of the 'Community' dimension to the recovery will include the impact on the voluntary and community sector, the need to accommodate those in temporary accommodation as a result of the pandemic and any consequential impact of the financial downturn on housing and homelessness, potential community tensions as society/town centres unlock and the sustainability of sports, leisure, culture and arts organisations.
- 2.23 Preparations are in hand to enable a smooth and safe return to greater use of our buildings/offices when the time is right. Wherever possible office-based staff have been and remain working from home. There is a small number of exceptions where work cannot be carried out from home for example opening and scanning post. In line with government guidance risk assessments have been undertaken for our buildings and for activities including site and home visits, safe operating practices have been produced and arrangements put in place to enable safe use of buildings now where needed for small numbers of staff and for greater use when the time is right. Staff have been briefed and had the opportunity to raise questions and make suggestions about safe operating arrangements. We have planned for phased return prioritising services where an office base for some time and officers would improve effectiveness and for staff in response to personal circumstances. Return to working from the office packs are being produced for staff and councillors and our buildings will have clear information throughout on safe practice and behaviours.
- 2.24 We have captured learning from the emergency response phase and experience from extensive home working. Learning includes improvements to agile working through multi-disciplinary task and finish pieces of work eg for delivery of the business grants and setting up of the community hub. We have taken the opportunity to review some activities which continue to be paper and post based at least to some degree including payments by cheque and sharing of planning applications with parish councils to encourage the people and organisations we interact with to change their ways of working ie to electronic transactions. Our internal Digital and Transformation Board will ensure that operational learning continues. Experience of the benefits and challenges of continuous home working has been captured through pulse surveys of all staff and of managers. This will inform our operational practice for the short term and will guide our development of HR policy and investment in technology for the longer term and consequently our accommodation needs. Feedback from members will also be key to this especially with respect to remote meetings of all types.

- 2.25 The Council has a clear vision and strategic priorities for the period to 2045. The impact of Covid19 will lead to a reappraisal of how these ambitions can be achieved and the timescales.
- 2.26 Whilst there have been some significant adverse consequences of the pandemic for many businesses, individuals, families and organisations, there have also been some positive outcomes. The rapid and compassionate community response, the enhanced and expanded working relationships that we have forged with partners, the reduction in carbon emissions and a requirement to develop new ways of working and getting about. We need to ensure that we capture and promote the good points as well as mitigating and responding to the adverse consequences of the crisis.

### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 Most of this report is for noting
- 3.2 The point for decision concerns the objectives for the MBC Covid19 recovery plan. It is essential to have a recovery plan – not to do so would not serve the authority as an organisation or the community well. It is preferable to have clear objectives to guide the development of the recovery plan.

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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the Policy and Resources Committee consider and agree clear objectives for the council's Covid19 recovery plan.

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### **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. A risk register will be established and maintain in accordance with programme and project management good practice.

### **6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 Informal consultation has taken place on the approach to recovery with political group leaders and on the proposed objectives with the members covid19 recovery consultative forum.
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## **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 This report is an introductory paper setting out high level issues, objectives, principles and structures for overseeing the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further reports, briefings and updates will be presented to Members in due course.
  - 7.2 Moving forwards, councillors, businesses, residents and partners will be involved in shaping our plans and strategies as they are changed and updated to reflect the realities of our operating environment
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## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None