

**Strategic Plan Review – Update on priority milestones**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Council
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Angela Woodhouse – Head of Policy, Communications and Governance Anna Collier – Policy and Information Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

This report summarises member feedback on the first steps to review the areas for focus in the Strategic Plan for 2019-24. The report proposes several actions to inform the prioritisation required to enable the council to deliver services within budgetary constraints and respond to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Purpose of Report**

Decision

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

**That the Committee**

1. Notes the content of the report and provides feedback on the assessment and conclusions drawn from member consultation on council priorities to date
2. Notes the feedback from members concerning capital investment in section 2.9 and agrees that this forms the basis for officers to develop proposals for further development of the capital strategy and programme and for future organisational roles and arrangements and to report back to subsequent Policy and Resources Committee meetings
3. Notes the context for place shaping and economic development set out in the report and agrees the service review briefly described at paragraph 2.15
4. Notes issues which need to be addressed concerning the council's role in community resilience referred to in paragraph 2.19 and agrees that a report concerning a protocol is progressed initially via the Communities Housing and Environment Committee

5. Agrees that the council initiates dialogue with the Business Improvement District concerning current challenges and future investment in the town centre.
6. Agrees that, working at pace with the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, officers review the scope of work undertaken and resources allocated to the community safety unit.
7. Agrees that, the direction of travel on modernising the arrangements at the museum is now more modest and focuses on making the best use of existing spaces.
8. Agrees that the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee review the contribution of the Hazlitt to the town centre economy and consider options for its sustainability. These findings should be reported back to the Policy and Resources Committee
9. Agrees to reduce the priority of raising resident satisfaction with cleanliness to maintaining it.
10. Agrees that the reference to individual projects like Go Green Go Wild are removed from areas of particular focus in the Strategic Plan.
11. Agrees that Climate Change becomes a cross cutting issue for all services to consider proactively and that an officer is no longer required to lead this work.

<b>Timetable</b>	
<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
Policy and Resources Committee	16 <sup>th</sup> September 2020 21 <sup>st</sup> October 2020 25 <sup>th</sup> November 2020 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2020 20 <sup>th</sup> January 2021 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
Council	24 <sup>th</sup> February 2021

# Strategic Plan Review – Update on priority milestones

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <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 2021-2026.</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>Members will also consider the cross-cutting objectives when they review and agree areas of focus for 2021-26 and the MTFS as it develops</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Risk Management</b>	Already covered in the risk section	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Financial</b>	The Strategic Plan sets the Council's Priorities and the direction for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Legal</b>	This review of the Council's priorities within the Strategic Plan will enable the Council to deliver services in an efficient and effective manner and which meets the needs and	Head of Legal Services

	<p>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 it appears likely that expenditure will exceed available resources. This review is relevant to the statutory obligation.</p> <p>The S151 Officer has a personal duty under Section 114(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to report to the Council if it appears that the set budget will be exceeded.</p> <p>This will also include the impacts of Section 115(6) of the Act which prohibits any new agreement which would incur expenditure from being entered into following the release of a S114 report and consideration of the implications by the Council. Having received a S114 report, members are obliged to take all reasonable practical measures to bring the budget back into balance. Key considerations for the Council include the need for an adequate contingency provision, taking into account the S151 officer’s guidance on the financial prudence of options before members and ensuring that there are reasonable grounds for making decisions.</p> <p>The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 place obligations on the Council to ensure that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control which includes arrangements for management of risk. The review will also contribute to the obligation being discharged.</p>	
<p><b>Privacy and Data Protection</b></p>	<p>The recommendations do not have an impact on privacy and data protection. If as a result of the update to the milestones and the emerging MTFS for 2021-2026 changes are required to services involving personal data, then data privacy impact</p>	<p>Policy and Information Team</p>

	assessments will be undertaken.	
<b>Equalities</b>	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 2021-2026 changes are required to services, then an Equalities Impact assessment will be undertaken.	Policy & Information Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	One of the Councils cross cutting objectives are 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 emerging MTFS for 2021-2026 changes are required to services, then a Health Impact assessment will be undertaken.	Head Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The recommendations include reviewing the areas of focus for 2021-26 for the Safe, Clean and Green Priority and the actions proposed are included at paragraph	Head Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications	Head Policy, Communications and Governance

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting of 21 July 2020 this committee agreed the approach and timetable for a review of the priorities and outcomes in the Strategic Plan 2019 to 2045 and updating the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to cover the five-year period 2021 to 2026. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee and seek decisions arising from the first steps of this process with respect to the review of priority milestones and outcomes in the Strategic Plan.
- 2.2 The current Strategic Plan was developed involving a wide cross section of Councillors, staff and other stakeholders in 2018 before being adopted in December of that year. The vision and priorities are clear and remain relevant. Progress has been made across all priorities and details were set out in the July report. In light of the pandemic and its significant impact, work is now being carried out to review our outcomes for 2019/24 to produce a refreshed set of outcomes for 2021/26 reflecting the change in context and resources arising from the impacts of the COVID-19 health emergency; the outcomes and milestones also need to respond to our COVID-19 recovery approach.
- 2.3 This report covers feedback from Councillors on current priorities. It does not cover actions to respond to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in depth. This will be considered more fully in subsequent reports in October

and November when results from the resident COVID-19 Impact and Recovery Consultation are available and workstreams on the four recovery themes agreed by Policy and Resources in June 2020 (i.e. economic recovery, supporting resilience for communities and vulnerable people, adapting the way we work and financial recovery) are more developed.

- 2.4 Feedback has been sought from Councillors concerning the current areas of focus for 2019-24; details are summarised in Appendix A. This has been shared and discussed with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Policy and Resources and service committees (i.e. Strategic Planning and Infrastructure, Communities Housing and Environment and Economic Regeneration and Leisure) and this has informed the topics and analysis set out below. This approach is like the engagement process carried out as the Strategic Plan was developed but less extensive reflecting the pace of change needed to respond to the challenges now facing the authority.

### Context

- 2.5 COVID-19 has had a major impact on the Council's financial position. Members were advised of the scale of the impact as currently assessed at the Policy and Resources Committee on 21 July 2020. The impact was set out for the current financial year and for the period of the MTFs. In July this Committee considered 3 scenarios – adverse, neutral, and favourable. The neutral scenario forecast a budget gap for 2021/22 of £3.3m (assuming that the pre-covid19 identified level of savings is achieved), and that there would be a further gap of £0.3m in 2022/23 with the COVID-19 impact diminishing thereafter and levels of saving returning to previously identified levels. Even if there is a rapid recovery from the pandemic, the financial impact will be felt for some time. The Council will have to draw on its reserves to fund the current financial year's deficit. The council will need to consider how quickly reserves can be rebuilt and the right level at which to maintain them in the future and reassess the overall level of resources available for the future.
- 2.6 A great degree of uncertainty remains around financial forecasts and the degree of support from central government. This arises from the complex context for local authority funding and changes that were being formulated pre COVID-19 for example with respect to business rates reform as well as the impact of the pandemic.
- 2.7 This piece of work (i.e. service prioritisation) needs to be conducted and concluded at pace so that the ramifications can be assessed and quantified and a proposed revised MTFs can be properly evaluated and presented to members by December 2020. It will be complemented by several other pieces of work described in the July report to Policy and Resources Committee by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement which will address;
- better use of technology,
  - external grant funding,
  - income generation,
  - office accommodation,
  - overhead costs of delivering the capital programme,

- overhead costs of project delivery,
- service commissioning,
- shared service arrangements,
- staff reward packages,
- the structure of democratic representation; and
- synergies between service areas.

#### Overarching Issues from Member feedback on priorities

- 2.8 The Council remains committed to delivering the vision in our Strategic Plan in a period of significant change and continuing uncertainty. This is not only as a result of the COVID-19 but also from central government policy changes including for spatial planning (currently the subject of consultation) and devolution (consultation is promised in the autumn). These are likely to have significant consequences for how and at what pace we can deliver our vision.
- 2.9 Success in delivering the vision for the borough as reflected in the council's Strategic Plan and the more specific short to medium term priorities depends on community leadership and collaboration with partners in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors.

#### Feedback from Councillors to date suggests

- There is continued support for the Council's direct capital investment in place shaping to create homes and jobs and greater investment to bring forward infrastructure in a timely way. In the immediate short term this is higher priority than investment in cultural assets.
- Building on our positive progress of working in partnership to achieve co-investment in our place we should identify more opportunities for joint funding and "joint venture" arrangements to enable larger scale investment in key priority areas including: place shaping, housing (in particular social and affordable housing) and infrastructure projects. One approach would be to use the leverage of our existing £110m 5-year capital investment programme and other opportunities including Enterprise Zone status and the Community Infrastructure Levy to accelerate progress. This would need a greater external focus and redirection of resources to build better partnerships faster.
- Consider "joint venture" arrangements such as a "development corporation" for putting place making investment at arm's length; this needs careful consideration in terms of risk, governance/democracy and financial consequences.
- Consider alternative models for bringing forward key infrastructure for example a revolving fund of loans to gap fund.
- There is an acceptance that a greater proportion of the cost of nurturing capital projects should be attributed to and therefore recovered as part of the capital allocation; any change in practice would need to meet appropriate accounting standards
- Appetite to apply similar joint investment principles in the (re) commissioning of services at the appropriate time including for waste collection (where our current contract ends in 2023) and

leisure (where our current contract relating to Maidstone leisure centre ends in 2024)

2.10 While capital projects will enable the council to achieve its Strategic Plan objectives officers' advice is that the scale of the current 5-year programme remains appropriate in terms of the consequences for the revenue budget and in the current circumstances significant expansion of capital borrowing does not offer a realistic strategy for solving the increased revenue budget pressures.

2.11 However, subject to the Policy and Resources confirming the direction of travel described in paragraph 2.9 above, officers will research options and consider the implications for the MTFs capital strategy and programme and for organisational roles and arrangements to improve delivery of growth and infrastructure and report back to subsequent Policy and Resources Committee meetings.

### Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure

2.12 We want Maidstone Borough to work for the people who live, visit and work now and in the future. We want a Borough where there is a variety of jobs, housing need is met, and infrastructure is in place to meet the growing needs of our residents and economy. We also want to ensure we lead and shape our place as it grows, including leading master-planning and investing to bring about high-quality housing and jobs in the Borough. The current adopted plan places importance on the following for 2019-24.

- Engaging with our communities on the Local Plan Review
- The Council taking a proactive role in creating and consider investing in new places
- Expanding the Council's role in the delivery of affordable and market rent housing
- Working with partners to get infrastructure planned, funded and delivered
- Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites

2.13 The Government is currently consulting on far reaching changes to the planning system through its "Planning for the Future" White Paper. Contemporaneously consultation is also underway on changes to planning policy and regulations including the standardised methodology for calculating housing requirements. Draft responses will be considered by the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The direction of travel is clear and impacts on both what the planning system is being required to deliver and how this is to be conducted. Engaging with our communities on local planning will remain as a key priority.

2.14 Action: As noted in 2.9 above member feedback has indicated a desire to continue and increase the council's role in delivering the capital investment schemes that make the place shaping aspirations in the local plan a reality.

2.15 Considering the new challenges ahead including: the impacts of COVID-19 and increased priority for tackling climate change, increased emphasis for

local councils leading delivery of infrastructure, increased local political appetite for more direct investment and impact on infrastructure delivery and less revenue resources it is recommended that - **Action: We should reflect on the effectiveness of our current services and reconsider our service delivery model looking at: expertise, organisational arrangements, including the synergies between planning policy and economic development, our arrangements for delivering/enabling construction projects, and agility.**

### Homes and Communities

2.16 We want to have a place that people love and where they can afford to live. This means ensuring that there is a good balance of different types of homes, including affordable housing. We will have safe and desirable homes that enable good health and wellbeing for our communities. We will address homelessness and rough sleeping to move people into settled accommodation. We will work with our partners to improve the quality of community services and facilities including for health care and community activities. Residents will be encouraged and supported to volunteer and play a full part in their communities. The current adopted plan places importance on the following for 2019-24.

- Reducing Rough Sleeping in a sustainable way
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation for homeless families
- Improving housing through use of our statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing
- Increasing our interventions with Houses of Multiple Occupation
- Supporting the health service to improve access to primary care including local care hubs

2.17 There is clear political commitment to maintaining a strong focus on the core activity relating to rough sleeping and homelessness. The need for this is accentuated by the impacts so far of COVID-19, and the anticipated impact of the removal of protections for people who rent their homes and flexibilities for some who own their homes but whose income has been adversely affected. The focus for resourcing these services will be covered by the other workstreams agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee including transformation and the funding model including greater flexibility in the application of grant funding.

2.18 Our 2019-24 areas of focus did not include giving high priority to developing community capacity/resilience. Although we were able to respond quickly to establish the Community Hub, the experience of COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses in the Council's arrangements for community support and working with others to enable resilience. This suggests the need to strengthen our strategic relationship with the voluntary and community sector, housing providers, KCC and parish councils. A stronger relationship will create clarity, common understanding and expand resources, so that our most vulnerable residents are always appropriately supported and especially at times of crisis.

2.19 This does not mean that the Council should step in and do what others are responsible for but that we should have appropriate and modern protocols in place. **Action: It is proposed that a report be brought to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee proposing a way forward. This would complement the excellent grant funded work conducted in our housing team to intervene earlier to prevent homelessness and in our revenues and benefits team to maximise household incomes and contribute positively to a borough that works for everyone. Progress on financial hardship work is scheduled to be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in October 2020.**

#### A Thriving Place

2.20 Our vision is for Maidstone to be a Borough that is open for business, attractive for visitors and an enjoyable and prosperous place to live for our residents. Maidstone is the Business Capital of Kent; we will continue to grow our local economy with high employment, good local jobs and thriving local businesses. We want our town and village centres to thrive and be fit for the future. We will lead investment in the County town and rural service centres through our regeneration projects and working with partners. We are proud of our heritage and will continue to grow our leisure and cultural offer. The current adopted plan places importance on the following for 2019-24:

- Development and commencement of delivering the new gallery at the museum
- Enabling events which assist people in increasing their pride in communities and our environment
- Reviewing and delivering leisure and cultural services that meet future needs e.g. sports facilities
- Building the innovation centre at Kent Medical Campus, promoting inward investment in the Borough
- Working with partners to redevelop the Maidstone East site and modernise the bus station in the County Town
- Developing and delivering plans for the five opportunity sites in the town centre and the Staplehurst regeneration project
- Working with parishes and community groups on neighbourhood plans

2.21 Several projects identified in the 2019-24 milestones have been progressed for example construction of the Innovation Centre and where appropriate have been embedded into our normal processes. The opportunity site policies are now being incorporated into the Local Plan to give structure to the Council's expectations of the private sector landowners and potential developers. Our next steps for the town centre are likely to be via a town centre action/investment plan through the Local Plan Review or a Development Plan Document to become mainstream. **Action: It is suggested that to enable an integrated approach for future opportunities this topic is part of the service delivery model review referred to at 2.15 above**

2.22 There is continued Councillor appreciation of the contribution that the Maidstone Museum and the Hazlitt Theatre make to the quality of life for

residents and visitors. However, the constraints on modernising the arrangements for the museum arising from the various historical trust arrangements mean that political appetite for significant investment at this time is limited. **Action: The direction of travel here may need to be more modest, focussing on unlocking governance constraints and making the best use of our existing spaces e.g. to attract exhibitions and paid for activities rather than undertaking capital investment.**

2.23 Covid19 has had a significant adverse impact for the Hazlitt theatre which is operated by Parkwood leisure and where the council provides a subsidy of £250k per year. While this is significantly less than the previous cost borne by the council for an in-house service it remains a sizeable contribution. Before making judgements on the council's future commitment to the Hazlitt it is key that its contribution to the town centre economy and alternative options for sustaining the theatre or alternative uses of the asset are better understood. **Action: it is proposed that this topic will be examined at a strategic level by the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee and in terms of the Strategic Plan, covered through future update to the Policy Resources Committee in conjunction with updating the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.**

2.24 Since the Strategic Plan was adopted a Business Improvement District (BID) has been created for Maidstone town centre run by One Maidstone. In the first year of operation this has particularly enabled additional investment in keeping the public realm clean and tidy and One Maidstone have moved forward too investing in activities to make the town centre attractive to investors and the public including taking over activities like the Christmas lights and some monitoring of CCTV. This has been somewhat impacted by lockdown and One Maidstone has been key in supporting businesses and enabling safe re-opening of the town centre from June onwards. **Action: It is suggested that the council initiates dialogue with the BID concerning current challenges and future investment in the town centre.**

#### Safe, Clean and Green

2.25 We will keep Maidstone an attractive and clean place for all. Maidstone is a safe place to live and we want our residents to feel safe. We want to protect and where possible enhance our environment and make sure our parks, green spaces, streets and public areas are high quality by ensuring they are looked after, well managed and respected. The current adopted plan places importance on the following for 2019-24.

- Taking action against those who do not respect our public spaces, streets, green spaces and parks
- Improving community safety by working with our partners to make people less vulnerable to crime
- Raising resident satisfaction with the cleanliness of the Borough
- Implementing the "Go Green Go Wild" project to embrace and encourage biodiversity and protect and enhance our green spaces
- Improving air quality

- 2.26 Levels of political satisfaction with general cleanliness in the borough are good and there is an emerging view that we should aim to maintain current standards and given other pressing matters **Action: not prioritise raising resident satisfaction with cleanliness of the Borough. There is an appreciation of and support for continued proactive enforcement work with respect to those individuals and organisations that fail to respect our public spaces, streets and parks.**
- 2.27 There is some political appetite to review the Council's role in securing community safety and a recognition that not all Councillors are familiar with the statutory requirements the Crime and Disorder Strategy and, action plan and the impact of our work although this is a topic that regularly receives attention from the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee and the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Panel. In brief the primary objective of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was to give more responsibility to local authorities with regards to implementing strategies to help with the reduction of crime and public disorder within the local community. This has been developed and added to through various pieces of legislation since 1998. The Council's direct contribution to community safety is delivered via the Community Protection Team and there is a requirement for crime and disorder implications to be considered in all strategic decision making (hence the reference in every committee report). The Crime and Disorder Strategy and priorities are agreed by Full Council each year; the latest plan was agreed in July 2020 with five priorities – protecting our communities against serious, violent and organised crime (including modern day slavery), reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse (including stalking), keeping children and young people safe, reducing the impact of substance mis-use on our community and safeguarding people whose mental health makes them vulnerable. **Action: The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee and, Officers review the scope of work undertaken and resources allocated to the community safety unit.**
- 2.28 Since the Strategic Plan was adopted in December 2018 the council, in April 2019, adopted a motion concerning the climate and biodiversity emergencies which among other things sought to consider a target date of 2030 for the whole of the Borough of Maidstone to be carbon neutral. Given this aspiration and the scale of the challenge **Action: A view has been expressed that reference to individual projects like Go Green Go Wild should be removed from the areas of particular focus in the Strategic Plan. The preferred alternative approach would be for the cross cutting objective 'Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected' to be broadened to include Climate Change. This will require all services to proactively pursue measures to reduce carbon emissions; it is envisaged that this would negate the need for an officer lead for this work.**

---

### 3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee agreed at the July meeting that work would go ahead with on refreshing the strategic plan through a review of the areas of focus for 2019-24. This report shows the outcome of the first stage in the process of

reviewing the areas of focus with actions set out to progress the work for a refreshed Strategic Plan and new MTFs for 2021-2026.

- 3.2 The Committee could review the actions and approve or identify new ones to enable the plan to be refreshed.
  - 3.3 The Committee could also request the refresh be undertaken in a different way.
- 

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

- 4.1 The committee is recommended to approve the actions set out in-line with the agreed approach to corporate planning set out in the report in July.
- 

#### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 Risks related to amending actions in the Strategic Plan will be detailed in future reports to this Committee as the changes are finalised.

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

- 6.1 All Councillors were consulted on the areas of focus of 2019-2024, they were asked to consider which should be deleted, kept or delayed and whether there were any new areas of action. The results of this are shown at **Appendix 1**. Following the short consultation, a meeting was held with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the four Service Committees to review the results and identify potential changes to the plan. As a result of the meeting several actions have been identified as set out in the report. Member and public feedback concerning the impact of the Covid19 pandemic is being sought currently; the public consultation period ends on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. A similar survey for councillors is also being conducted. The Officer recovery group is working on impacts and actions which will be informed by this feedback amongst other things and will feed into subsequent reports on priorities for 2021-6.
- 

#### **7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 Actions if approved will be taken forward by the relevant Committees and Officers including budget prioritisation. Further reports will come to this committee monthly prior to submission to Council for Approval at the end of February.
-

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Results of Member prioritisation of Areas of Focus for 2019-24

---

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None