## Community Resilience working with the Voluntary and Community Sector and Parish Councils

| Final Decision-Maker | Communities Housing and the Environment |
|---|---|
| Lead Director | Mark Green Head of Finance and Business Improvement |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy Communications and Governance, Anna Collier Policy and Information Manager |
| Classification | Public |
| Wards affected | All |

**Executive Summary**

The Coronavirus Pandemic and resulting lockdown which started in March 2020, has demonstrated just how invaluable local community groups and Parish Councils are to both to the residents of Maidstone and to the Council. The Policy and Resources Committee agreed on the 16 September 2020 that there were issues which need to be addressed concerning the council's role in community resilience and agreed that a report concerning a protocol is progressed initially via the Communities Housing and Environment Committee.

**Purpose of Report**

Decision

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

1. That local partners are consulted with the intention to develop a local compact for Maidstone which will include respective roles and mutual support in emergencies.
2. That the Access to Services Review expand its remit to include building a repository of community organisations across the Borough.
3. Amend the Parish Charter subject to the agreement of Parish Council's to reflect their important role in emergencies.
4. Note the provision of Parish Council newsletters and joint webinars with KALC to ensure regular communication and feedback.
5. Create a single point of contact and advertise this for Parish Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Maidstone.
6. That officers bring back a progress update in April 2021

| Timetable | |
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| **Meeting** | **Date** |
| Corporate Leadership Team | 20 October 2020 |
| Communities, Housing and Environment Committee | 3 November 2020 |

**Community Resilience working with the Voluntary and Community Sector and Parish Councils**

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|---|---|---|
| **Impact on Corporate Priorities** | *The four Strategic Plan objectives are:*<br><br>• *Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure*<br>• *Safe, Clean and Green*<br>• *Homes and Communities*<br>• *A Thriving Place*<br><br>The recommended actions will further the council's progress for all its objectives and for the Homes and Communities priority in particular. | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| **Cross Cutting Objectives** | *The four cross-cutting objectives are:*<br><br>• *Heritage is Respected*<br>• *Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced*<br>• *Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved*<br>• *Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected*<br>An improved relationship with the voluntary and community sector will facilitate progress for all the cross-cutting objectives. | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| **Risk Management** | Already covered in the risk section | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| **Financial** | The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation. | Section 151 Officer & Finance Team |
| **Staffing** | There will be Staffing implications and these are set out in section 2 | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| **Legal** | Under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended) a best value authority has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its | Team Leader (Corporate Covernance, MKLS |

| | functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The proposals within the report assist in demonstrate compliance with the statutory duty.<br><br>Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities in England a general power of competence to do anything that individuals may do. The general power applies to things that an individual may do even though they are in nature, extent or otherwise unlike anything the Council may do apart from Section 1.<br><br>Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the Council has the 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 their functions.<br><br>The proposals are within the powers shown above. | |
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| **Privacy and Data Protection** | Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council.  We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules and a data privacy impact assessment will be undertaken if required. | Policy and Information Team |
| **Equalities** | The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment | Policy & Information Manager |
| **Public Health** | Building community resilience using an asset-based approach to empower communities will impact positively on the health of those communities. However further consideration needs to be undertaken to consider how the most deprived communities in Maidstone will be supported where health inequalities are most stark as these are generally areas without a Parish Council. In addition the role of the NHS and GP surgeries as anchor institutions in both large and small communities should be considered in any | Public Health Officer |

| | plan around community resilience. | |
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| **Crime and Disorder** | Not applicable | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |
| **Procurement** | *Not applicable* | Head of Policy, Communications and Governance |

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Coronavirus Pandemic and resulting lockdown which started in March, has demonstrated just how invaluable local community groups and agencies, including Parishes, are to the residents of Maidstone and as essential partners of the Council.  The help and support of these groups during lockdown ensured many residents had their basic needs such as food, medicine and conversation met.

2.2 The Council alone would have struggled to provide all this additional support across the Borough, in addition to what it was providing as the Community Hub as well as its statutory services.

2.3 The Policy and Resources Committee agreed on the 16 September 2020 that there were issues which need to be addressed concerning the Council's role in community resilience and agreed that a report concerning a protocol be progressed initially via the Communities Housing and Environment Committee.

2.4 Reflection and learning undertaken by Members and Officers has identified several benefits that can be made from changing the way in which the Council, Community Groups and Parishes work together.

- Building resilience
- Avoiding duplication
- Improved communication and identification of common goals
- Making best use of our community infrastructure
- Identifying and accessing community infrastructure to empower our communities to help themselves
- Identify missing services in communities
- Ensuring knowledge of who is best placed to respond in an emergency

2.5 These have been distilled into three objectives

A. To ensure that we are best placed along with our partners to respond whatever the emergency in the borough
B. To build on increased trust and communication with our partners to work on issues of joint interest and priority.
C. Ensuring that we build on our existing relationship with Parish Councils and provide mutual support for the benefit of our residents

## A) **To ensure that we are best placed along with our partners to respond whatever the emergency in the borough**

2.6   Beyond the Pandemic Maidstone Council has responded to a range of emergency situations.  We know that responses work best when the right people are involved, with the greatest expertise.

2.7   Experience from the recent pandemic has shown that there would be value in identifying strategic organisations across the borough who could help and support both the council and residents in an emergency.

2.8   A framework to develop this type of arrangement already exists between the public sector and the third sector.  A Local Compact is a voluntary agreement that aims to foster strong, effective partnerships between public bodies and voluntary organisations. The Compact outlines five principles for partners to follow. Within each principle, there are undertakings for partners to commit to. The National Compact principles are:

- A strong, diverse and independent civil society
- Effective and transparent design and development of policies, programmes and public services
- Responsive and high-quality programmes and services
- Clear arrangements for managing changes to programmes and services
- An equal and fair society

2.9   A compact would establish a framework for good partnership working with our key partners and allows for the principles to be interpreted to reflect local circumstances.

2.10  The strength of this approach is it is an existing formal structure. Best practice examples and other resources are available to access, so it won't mean starting from scratch.

2.11  Also, in its favour a compact requires substantial engagement with partners, and arrangements will be well documented.

2.12  The formality, however, means that it will be resource intensive initially and likely require ongoing administrative support, and a digital presence.

2.13  The Compact also provides a solution for objective two as it sets out how we will engage and communicate with each other.

2.14  With regard to Parishes the Council already has in place a Parish Charter which provides a framework within which the Borough Council and Parish Councils have made a formal commitment to closer partnership working. Seven key principles are identified in the Charter, the role of both organisations in relation to an Emergency response could be added as an additional principle or built into the first principle - Leadership.

## B) To build on increased trust and communication with our partners to work on issues of joint interest and priority.

2.15 Currently it is challenging for us to know and build relationships with community groups working across the borough.  This is not unusual for Council's and other public services.  However, this does not mean that Maidstone shouldn't strive to have as broad as possible knowledge of community groups operating in the Maidstone Borough area.

2.16 This knowledge should translate itself into:

- A central repository of key contacts held by the Council and made publicly available for use of residents
- A well-publicised point of contact within the authority for groups to reach out too
- Methods by which the Council can ensure that it engages with these community groups both at a strategic level and at an operational service design level, when appropriate.

2.17 Members may want to be involved in the development of this repository, drawing on their own knowledge and networks, and expanding them. Currently Members are undertaking with the support of the Policy and Information team an Access to Services Review.  Members may want to add the development of the repository to the programme of work, as providing residents with access to services beyond the Council's remit.

2.18 Currently Involve are asked to create and maintain a list of voluntary organisations across the Borough as part of the SLA they have with the Council. A list is available upon request, however, it isn't as broad as the Council needs and has a focus on social prescribing. This list could be added to the information we now have created on the voluntary and community organisations in the Borough in response to the pandemic.

2.19 Officers are currently in dialogue with Involve to establish future working arrangements in relation to the SLA.  This may have an impact on this piece of work and ongoing funding arrangements.

2.20 In the Strategic Plan areas of focus for 2019-24 within the Homes and Community Objective we did not give 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.

2.21 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. The suggestion going forward is that our website is further developed to build on the information we collected regarding voluntary and community groups during

the pandemic and  a single point of contact is created through one email address and inbox for voluntary and community organisations. The inbox would be managed by the Policy and Information team. The team would use their knowledge of the council to ensure enquiries are managed and responded to. This will have resource implications for the team.

2.22 The Local Compact once established could be further developed to tackle strategic projects or one-off pieces of work with key partners on a task and finish basis. This would build on the success of already established work being undertaken with the voluntary sector for example to work with the Citizen's Advice Bureau on social inclusion.

## C) <u>**Ensuring that we build on our existing relationship with Parish Councils and provide mutual support for the benefit of our residents**</u>

2.23 In response to the pandemic and in order to maintain an ongoing dialogue with Parishes a weekly Parish newsletter was started, this has now transitioned to a monthly bulletin.  Feedback has been received from Parishes that this regular contact was welcomed.

2.24 Officers would like to build on this communication and following conversations with Councillors and Parish Councils propose:

- A parish webinar with the Leader and Deputy Leader held jointly with Maidstone KALC three times a year.
- A monthly newsletter
- A monitored parish inbox as a one stop shop for queries and requests
- Amending the Parish Charter to reflect the role of Parish Councils in emergencies.

2.25 Consideration has been given to the reintroduction of the Parish Liaison Officer position.  However, when surveyed at the time the post existed only a third of parishes saw value in this post. In addition, the funding for this post was ceased a number of years ago.  There is currently not sufficient capacity to create this post within existing resources. It is proposed that the work is managed by the Policy and Information Team; to do this alongside the additional work to increase engagement with community groups will have resource implications.

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## 3.    AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1  The Policy and Resources Committee in September noted issues which need to be addressed concerning the council's role in community resilience and agreed that a report concerning a protocol was progressed initially via the Communities Housing and Environment Committee. This report sets out how a protocol could be put in place via a local compact and adapting the Parish Charter alongside actions to improve communication and engagement.

3.2   Members could decide to recommend to Policy and Resources that no further action is required.

3.3   The Committee could the actions proposed to create a protocol and approve or identify new ones.

3.4   The Committee could identify a different approach to that set out in the papers to meet the objectives of Policy and Resources Committee

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## 4.   PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1   To best support the objectives expressed by the Policy and Resources Committee it is recommended that the following activities be pursued:

- Develop and agree a local compact with voluntary and community sector
- Add key Strategic Community Partners to the Council's emergency plan with their agreement
- Amend the Parish Charter to reflect the role of Parish Councils' in emergencies
- Create a single point of contact within the Policy and Information Team for the voluntary and community sector via a single email address and inbox
- Create a single point of contact within the Policy and Information Team for Parish Councils via a single email address and inbox
- Continue to build communication and engagement with Parish Councils through joint webinars with Maidstone KALC and regular newsletters.

4.2   The reasons have been set out in section 2 of the report with the purpose of these actions being to:

- Build resilience
- Avoid duplication
- Improve communication and identification of common goals
- Make best use of our community infrastructure
- Identify and access community infrastructure to empower our communities to help themselves
- Identify missing services in communities
- Ensuring knowledge of who is best placed to respond in an emergency

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## 5.   RISK

5.1   The intention of the actions proposed in this report is to mitigate the risk to residents in emergencies through improving our knowledge of those who can respond and greater clarity on roles.

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## 6.    CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1    This report is part of a series of reports and information for councillors on the revising the Council's Strategic Plan and areas of focus for 2021-26 following the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic. This report follows member consideration of the Council's priorities and a report to Policy and Resources. The report to Policy and Resources Committee on 16 September 2020 can be found here:

http://aluminum:9080/documents/s72419/Strategic%20Plan%20Review%20-%20Update%20on%20Priority%20Milestones.pdf

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

7.1    The outcome of this report and agreed actions will be reported to Policy and Resources Committee. If the actions are approved as set out in section 3 work will commence to involve and consult with key voluntary and community sector organisations and Parish Councils

## 8.    REPORT APPENDICES

None

## 9.    BACKGROUND PAPERS

http://aluminum:9080/documents/s72419/Strategic%20Plan%20Review%20-%20Update%20on%20Priority%20Milestones.pdf