

Appendix A

Policy and Resources Committee – 25th November 2020

Strategic Plan Update

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 first steps in this review including engagement with all councillors were undertaken in August and reported to the Committee at its September meeting where decisions were made about key areas of focus for cost reduction and approaches to leveraging resources to complement the council's spending and investment. The Committee was updated in October 2020. This report updates the Committee further on progress made with respect to these decisions.

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. Considering 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.

The decisions made in September by this Committee were -

- Further development of the Council's capital strategy and programme including consideration of partnership funding of large-scale projects and infrastructure including consideration of joint ventures and development corporation
- A review of planning and economic development services reflecting on the effectiveness of our current services and reconsidering our service delivery model taking into account the changes in the planning system and looking at: expertise, organisational arrangements, including the synergies between planning policy and economic development, our arrangements for delivering/enabling construction projects, and agility.
- A report concerning a protocol for working strategically with the community and voluntary sectors and parishes is progressed initially via the Communities Housing and Environment Committee

- That the council initiates dialogue with the Business Improvement District concerning current challenges and future investment in the town centre
- Officers review the scope of work undertaken and resources allocated to the community safety unit.
- 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.
- Review of the contribution of the Hazlitt to the town centre economy and consideration of options for its sustainability.
- Reduction of the priority of raising resident satisfaction with cleanliness to maintaining it.
- References to individual projects are removed from areas of focus in the Strategic Plan.
- Climate change becomes a cross cutting issue for all services to consider proactively and that an officer is required to lead this work and be proactive in finding funding streams to complement the council's commitment

Since September attention has been particularly focussed on decisions which have the greatest bearing on achieving a balanced revenue budget for 2021/2 and beyond. Officers have developed options for future service delivery for our cultural services and have commenced work to enable review of community safety and planning and economic development services. The current position is summarised below.

Firstly, with respect to the strategic objective for a Thriving Borough and specifically arts and culture services. Options papers were presented to the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee concerning the Maidstone museums and Hazlitt Theatre on 12 November 2020.

The outcomes with respect to Maidstone Museums were

- Agreement to objectives to underpin the future operational model for the museums
- A revenue savings target of a minimum of £152,000; £138k arising from reduction in opening hours to take effect by April 2021 and the balance from a package of other actions to take effect by April 2022

- Engagement with key and prospective stakeholders including the Maidstone Museum Foundation with respect to the service delivery outcomes to be achieved while working within these parameters
- That a further report is presented to the committee setting out how the existing capital allocation to the Museum can be used to make the best use of our existing spaces, address accessibility to the collections and reduce the net revenue costs of the museum.

The outcome with respect to the Hazlitt theatre which is operated by Parkwood Leisure and has been closed since March 2020 was recognition that the council's subsidy for the theatre is not sustainable in the current financial circumstances and the authority's funding for the theatre be significantly reduced. The impact for the short term will be to maintain the building while it cannot be used as a theatre, identify any short term uses and reconsider the position when the impact of the covid19 pandemic has diminished and the council's financial outlook is more positive. This decision has been called-in and the topic will be considered afresh by the Policy and Resources Committee on November 25th.

These decisions have been factored into the draft Medium-Term Financial Strategy which is covered in more depth later in this report. This will be reviewed in light of the decision of the Policy and Resources Committee and any change in the position with respect to the Hazlitt theatre.

Discussions have taken place with the Chair of the Business Improvement District Board. MBC and the BID have worked closely and positively to support town centre businesses during the pandemic, ensuring good quality and timely advice and guidance throughout, that the public were warmly welcomed back to the high street when restrictions were eased in June and subsequently guidance about behaviours to protect public health have been well communicated. The BID has experienced an adverse impact with respect to income in common with many organisations because of Covid19. Consequently, BID spending has been refocussed. Given the second lockdown and impacts arising from closure of non-essential retail, leisure and hospitality sectors and an overall reduction in footfall there is recognition of the risks of further restructuring of this part of the town's economy with implications for the long term offer. MBC and the BID will work together create as positive commercial environment as possible eg through attractive shop front displays and collaboration on CCTV.

Secondly, with respect to a Safe Clean and Green Borough. A presentation which was open to all councillors to attend, was made on the objectives and scope of community protection and safety services on 3 November 2020. The planned follow up report to the Communities,

Housing and Environment Committee, will now be presented in January 2021 rather than December 2020. This is because the analysis to inform the report has been slightly delayed by the need to divert resources to community and business support arising from the national measures put in place to address Covid19 which commenced on 5 November. In the meantime, the service has put forward a reduction in spend of £56k arising from changes in operational and staffing arrangements. This has been factored into the draft MTFs.

Next, with respect to embracing growth and enabling infrastructure. Informal discussion with key members (the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee and the Chairs of the Planning, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure and Economic Regenerations and Leisure Committees) has resulted in 5 proposed areas of focus for future service development and efficiency improvements. These are set out below and feedback is invited from the Policy and Resources Committee

- a. Producing a growth and investment statement – which makes our ambitions clear with more of a “think big” ambition focussed on the Kent Medical Campus, Heathlands, the Maidstone “County Town” Plan and motorway junction employment sites and greater political engagement in its delivery
- b. Changing our approach to the Local Plan Review/plan making including making the Local Plan a corporate project rather than a planning project, taking more of a commissioning approach to the plan, making process ensuring that this is led by a suitably knowledgeable client manager and preparing for/implementing change to plan making arising from the recent “Planning for the Future” White paper. Timing is key to avoid disruption of the current LPR, to enable adoption of the LPR as planned by October 2022 and any change required by the government arising from the White Paper in advance if this is required
- c. Greater use of technology including enabling more extensive customer self-service, for public engagement, better use of business analytics, consideration of AI for some functions and efficiency improvement from centralisation of and better access to data
- d. A further step change in terms of focus on delivery with consideration of alternative delivery and governance models
- e. Skills development to achieve the new ways of working

Finally, with respect to housing and communities. 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 (CHE) Committee. This needs to be seen in the context of our existing strategic plan areas of focus which have, to date, given low priority to community development activity. A report was taken to CHE on the 3 November 2020 with actions set out to fulfil three distilled 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

The report set out information on creating a local compact with the voluntary and community sector in the Borough. A compact would establish a framework for good partnership working at a local level and can be based on practical examples from elsewhere. In addition to this a single repository of community organisation be created to understand the resource available to support residents generally and at times of crisis. For Parishes, the focus will be on building the relationship we already have, refining our charter and ensuring we provide a clear single point of contact and continued regular communication.

The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee agreed:

- a. 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.
- b. That the access to services review expand its remit to include building a repository of community organisations across the Borough.
- c. To amend the Parish Charter subject to the agreement of Parish Council's to reflect their important role in emergencies.
- d. Note the provision of Parish Council newsletters and joint webinars with the Maidstone branch of the Kent Association of Local Councils to ensure regular communication and feedback.

- e. Creation of a single point of contact and advertising of this for Parish Councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Maidstone.
- f. That officers bring back an update on this in February and in April 2021