

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**10 FEBRUARY 2020**

### **REFERENCE FROM THE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

#### **Issue for Decision**

To consider the reference submitted by the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee.

#### **Recommendation**

That the Policy and Resources Committee be requested to allocate £140,000 of the funding available from the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Fund for planning policy development.

#### **Background**

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and referenced the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to the Committee on 8 December 2020, whereby the financial implications and budget gap caused by Covid-19 were outlined.

As a result of the Local Government Finance Settlement and the Chancellor's Spending Review, the Council's budget gap had been reduced from £2.4 million to £1.6 million but remained significant. The savings proposals outlined would enable the budget gap to be closed over the next three years. Those proposed within the Committee's remit focused on the planning service through Better use of technology and Service improvements, that would each deliver a £75,000 saving for future years by 2022/23 and 2023/34 respectively. The service improvements were explained in the context of the Government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, that aimed to streamline the planning process.

The Committee were informed that if the nine parking spaces in King Street were permanently lost to a further active travel scheme, the income reduction would total £26,000. Any proposals by Kent County Council would be subject to public consultation.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement explained that whilst the £860,000 in Government funding was not ringfenced, it was designed to assist the Council in coping with the pressures arising from Covid-19 and would be a one-off payment. It was not intended to bridge the Council's budget gap. The £139,000 provided through the Local Tax Support Grant was also a one-off payment and would be used in lieu of New Homes Bonus.

The Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the exploit of synergies between the planning and economic development service areas had been examined but could not be achieved at the present time.

The Committee felt that further resources should be directed to the formation and strengthening of the Council's planning policies, including those linked to climate change. There were concerns expressed that the Local Plan Review budget was insufficient, with further funding requested. Reference was made to the projected savings figures outlined for future years.

### **Background Papers**

Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals – 12 January 2021 – Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee.