

Recovery and Renewal Discussion Paper

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Director	Alison Broom, Chief Executive
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy Communications and Governance Anna Collier, Policy, and Information Manger
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to encourage discussion and capture the views of Policy and Resources Committee Members to inform the action plan for recovery and renewal.

Purpose of Report

Decision and discussion

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

Discuss the principles and approach outlined in this paper and **Appendix A** to inform the action plan for recovery and renewal to be presented in July.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	23 June 2021

Recovery and Renewal Discussion Paper

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>Homes and Communities</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> <p>The Council's approach to recovery and renewal from the impact of Covid-19 will support and align with the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan.</p>	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Heritage is Respected</i> • <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i> • <i>Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</i> • <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i> <p>The report sets out a discussion on our approach to recovery and renewal which will impact on all four cross-cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Risk Management	Covered in the risk section of the report	Head of Policy Communications and Governance
Financial	Financial information has been included in the body of the report. The action plan will be costed, and full budget implications set out when a further report is presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in July 2021.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	Staffing implications will be considered in developing the action plan.	Head of Policy Communications and Governance

<p>Legal</p>	<p>The Council has a general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 1972, section 111(1) also empowers a local authority 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. The recommendation and the proposals in this report regarding recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic are arrangements that can be undertaken under the above legislation.</p> <p>The Council will also be obliged to comply with relevant legislation, such as the Coronavirus Act 2020, related regulations, the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and such other updated legislation required to address the continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the recovery proposals being considered by the Council as part of the "Build Back Better" agenda.</p>	<p>Head of Mid Kent Legal Partnership</p>
<p>Privacy and Data Protection</p>	<p>Accepting the recommendations will not increase the data held at this stage. It is recognised that as projects emerge Data Protection Impact Assessment will need to be considered</p>	<p>Policy and Information Manager</p>
<p>Equalities</p>	<p>The recommendations do not propose a change in service at this stage therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment it is recognised that as projects emerge an EQIA will need to be considered</p>	<p>Policy and Information Manager</p>
<p>Public Health</p>	<p>The proposed actions are being considered in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency which has had and will continue to have implications for the health and well-being of residents directly and the wider determinants of health. The outbreak of COVID-19 has emphasised the interdependencies of health and the economy It has also further highlighted the health inequalities that already existed prior to the outbreak with particular groups</p>	<p>Public Health Officer</p>

	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' published in June 2020 and the local experience in Maidstone borough. The Council's recovery approach will need to consider these implications moving forward.	
Crime and Disorder	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 to respond to the increase. In 2020 reports of anti-social behaviour more than doubled at 440 compared to 217 the previous year, noise and other nuisance complaints also increased significantly.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Procurement	On accepting the action plan, the Council will then follow procurement processes where required for the plan to be implemented ensuring that financial and contract procedure rules are followed	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to enable debate to establish a clear strategy and set of actions for our future work on recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 pandemic. An initial report concerning our approach to recovery was presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in June 2020, following the first wave of the pandemic. The report included the overall aim of delivering a safe, sustainable, managed recovery, a range of objectives and actions relating to economic recovery, community resilience, the Council's future financial sustainability and the way we work themes underpinned by a communication strategy. Much has changed since then as we have experienced a second wave of the virus and associated national measures and lockdown. The Council's attention has therefore been focused on response to support residents and businesses locally and to assist public health services in a range of activities including track and trace, testing and vaccination efforts. Full Council considered the impact of the pandemic with respect to its Strategic Plan in February 2021 and agreed to some changes in the areas of focus for the period 2021-26 which reflected the impacts of the pandemic on the economy and the health and wellbeing of our residents.
- 2.2 On 9 June 2021 a virtual briefing was held for Members on the impact to date of the pandemic and a discussion on the approach to recovery

including what 'Build Back Better' would mean for Maidstone. Based on this session and the observations and feedback provided by attending members, a report was requested that would generate further discussion and conclusions to shape a subsequent action plan for recovery and renewal.

- 2.3 In March 2021 the Government published its approach to "Build Back Better":

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>

The Policy and Resources Committee is invited to consider whether we should adopt a similar approach and if so what "Build Back Better" would mean for the borough both in terms of overall objectives and the projects that could contribute to this. Some initial ideas about what "Build Back Better" could mean are set out in section 3 below. Several project ideas are included at **Appendix A**. Following this debate consideration will be given at the July Meeting of this Committee to proposals for a programme of projects including resource requirements.

- 2.4 How we achieve our strategic plan vision, our objectives, our priorities, and our operating models for delivery will require some reimagining. Recovery and renewal will involve short, medium, and long-term political and policy choices for the Council as well as operational 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 wellbeing of our borough.

- 2.5 The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted every aspect of people's lives. Consideration of what "Build Back Better" means for Maidstone Borough and identification and prioritisation of actions to achieve recovery and renewal is dependent on a good understanding of the effects of the pandemic and the impacts on residents and businesses. Surveys have been conducted with the public and with the local voluntary and community sector (Appendix B). Results of our resident survey can be found here:

<https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/council-and-democracy/primary-areas/consultations/closed-consultations?resident-covid-19-impact-and-response-survey>

We are yet to see the whole effect and impact of the pandemic and are in the challenging position of working in response at that same time as taking actions for recovery and renewal.

- 2.6 The key messages from the data relating to Maidstone Borough's communities and businesses are:

- The council has supported the most vulnerable residents in the borough including over 10,500 people who have been identified as Clinically

Extremely Vulnerable and a significant number of families who have been financially vulnerable for example during the first wave over 1,200 food parcels were delivered in addition to the significant support provided through foodbanks and parish councils. The spatial distribution for these food parcels reflected the pattern of deprivation in the borough

- Almost 13,000 of our residents have been diagnosed with Covid19 and over 440 have died; the whole borough has been affected however the incidence of the virus is greater in parts of the borough where the index of multiple deprivation is greater and the consequence is accentuation of existing health inequalities.
- Effects include a significant increase in the number of people who are in receipt of Universal Credit and other benefits including council tax support. Whilst the whole borough has been affected the communities most impacted are those which are the most deprived.
- Economic impacts have been substantial. We have made payments to almost 9800 businesses, distributing over £54.5 million of government grant support in the Borough. Town centre vacancy rates have increased to over 18%; this compares with typical vacancy rates of 10-11% for previous years.
- Unemployment rates have also increased. Typically, pre-pandemic unemployment rates across the borough were less than 2%; during the pandemic this increased to over 5%. Rates have varied between sectors and different parts of the borough with High Street ward (9.8%), Shepway South (7.7%), Shepway North (6.9%) and Parkwood (6.8%) experiencing the highest levels.
- There have been significant adverse impacts for young people. For example, since March 2020 there has been an increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training each month in comparison with the same month the previous year.

2.7 The contribution of communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been remarkable and the Council are truly grateful for everyone's effort, support, and assistance. It is imperative that we continue to work with our communities, the community and voluntary sector including parish councils and anchor institutions to focus on: building resilience, improving communication and making best use of our community infrastructure to empower our communities to help themselves.

2.8 The pandemic has had a major impact on the pace of change in on-line/digital service delivery for example to enable access to council, health, and education services. The way organisations work has changed with technology enabling greater home and remote working. This will remain a key component of the new normal. This has major implications, on the way in which businesses operate and use space, and commuting patterns for workers, but also heightens challenges such as digital exclusion for some groups.

- 2.9 Environmental awareness has been significantly raised, and, within the context of global climate and biodiversity emergencies, this has resulted in increased expectations in government policy for a green recovery. These factors give the opportunity to accelerate Maidstone's ambitions in terms of clean growth, sustainable travel, and natural capital.
- 2.10 The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on the Council's service delivery. Changes in resident's needs and secure working practices for the public and our staff have changed the way we work. To complement this, we have changed a variety of employment policies and procedures following feedback from staff as to what is working well and what could be improved to enable remote and agile working. Looking to the future we need to make the most of the opportunities to capture the benefits of the changes made during the pandemic and incorporate into our planning for example for future office accommodation requirements.
- 2.11 The Government has allocated £1.55 billion to local authorities for COVID-19 expenditure pressures. Maidstone's share of this grant is £860,000 and in accordance with government guidance, the first call on this should be for expenditure incurred in responding to COVID-19. Beyond this, it would be appropriate to deploy this funding to support COVID-19 recovery activities.
- 2.12 In addition to the un-ringfenced grant, the Government has announced the £56 million 'Welcome Back Fund' designed to help boost the look and feel of high streets, and to help councils prepare for the safe return of shoppers and tourists. Maidstone's allocation from this fund is £153,551.
- 2.13 Several ringfenced and other grants will continue to support specific activities related to the Council's COVID-19 response. These include the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), from which Maidstone has been allocated £222,043 for 2021-22, in addition to £371,103 devolved from Kent County Council during 2020/21, Test and Trace Grants and New Burdens funding.
- 2.14 The Council also has access to other funding streams which may be used to support certain activities linked to recovery planning. These include s106 funding for town centre planning, and income retained through the Kent Business Rates Pool which can be used for activities which support economic development more widely.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to discuss the "Build Back Better" principles below and project ideas identified at **Appendix A** to give direction and input into the recovery and renewal action plan:
- **Levelling up** – renewed focus on **improving people's life chances and a healthy recovery** including addressing inequalities already present that have been accentuated by the pandemic e.g. for health and wealth/financial precariousness.

- **Strengthening community resilience** – continuing to build relationships with Parishes, Community and Voluntary Sector and carry out projects to enable people to help themselves and support the community and voluntary sector.
 - **Build back greener** – this refers to delivering the UK’s Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution; should we put a greater emphasis on the council’s climate change and biodiversity action plan?
 - **Building back faster** the examples in the government’s document are about planning – which includes more permitted development which may be harmful at a local level; do we want to consider making our decision making faster?
 - **Delivering the vision for Global Britain** – which we could perhaps express as **support business through transition post Brexit**
 - **Think local in terms of our economy** for example work with the Anchor Institutions in our borough on training, skills and recruitment for local people and spending locally when procuring services wherever possible
 - **The way we work** – e.g. capturing and sustaining the experience and benefits of the pandemic for agile working
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to consider and discuss the principles for what “Build Back Better” means for the Borough and the project ideas set out in Appendix A, to inform the costed action plan that will come to this Committee in July 2021.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The Coronavirus Pandemic has had a severe and long-lasting impact on the lives of Maidstone communities and businesses, not responding and effectively planning for recovery and renewal will increase the risk to our communities and businesses as well as the Council.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 As well as consultation with Councillors through the Member COVID-19 recovery consultative forum, reports were received on a regular basis by Policy and Resources in 2020 and 2021:

24 June 2020: Response to Covid19 Public Health Emergency
Approach to recovery from the Covid19 Pandemic

16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones

20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026
and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery

10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh

- 6.2 On the 9 June 2021 a virtual member briefing was held for Members where information was provided on the impact to date of the pandemic, the discussion on what 'Build Back Better' would mean for Maidstone and other feedback was used to refine the actions in Appendix A.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 An action plan will be produced for decision by Policy and Resources on 21 July 2021.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Recovery and Renewal Actions
 - Appendix B: Voluntary and Community Sector Survey Summary
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

24 June 2020: Response to Covid19 Public Health Emergency
<http://app07:9080/documents/s71373/Maidstone%20Councils%20Response%20to%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

24 June 2020: Approach to recovery from the Covid19 Pandemic
<http://app07:9080/documents/s71374/Maidstone%20Councils%20approach%20to%20Recovery%20from%20the%20Covid19%20Pandemic.pdf>

16 September 2020: Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones
<http://app07:9080/documents/s72419/Strategic%20Plan%20Review%20-%20Update%20on%20Priority%20Milestones.pdf>

20 January 2021: Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery
<http://app07:9080/documents/s74258/Strategic%20Plan%20-%20Proposed%20Areas%20for%20Focus%202021-2026%20and%20KPIs%20for%20Covid19%20Recovery.pdf>

10 February 2021: Strategic Plan Refresh
<http://app07:9080/documents/s75590/Strategic%20Plan%20Refresh.pdf>