

## APPENDIX 1

### **Corporate Improvement Plan progress update**

#### **March 2015 – To date**

The Corporate Improvement Plan explains the key workstreams for the Council's improvement journey, the drivers for improvement as well as priority services and projects for improvement. It allows work to be planned, sufficiently supported and monitored to ensure savings needs and the improvements required for the Council to meet its priority outcomes are delivered.

Progress on the improvement workstreams and the projects that sit in these workstreams is reported to Cabinet as part of the performance report every six months. The progress report for October – March 2014/15 is shown below.

<b>Efficiency and effectiveness workstream</b>	
<b>Planning – James Bailey</b> Exploring opportunities to make the Development Management Service more efficient and improve the value for money of specialist advice	<b>AMBER</b>
<p>New indicators have been produced to enable active management of day to day performance however not all performance indicators previously agreed have been developed. Significant improvements have been made to the MKIP Service with validation timeframes and quality of service greatly improved. Performance in key areas such as majors, minors and others applications and appeal success rates has been good and continues to be strong set against challenging times with significant pressures on workload and officer retention.</p> <p>Officer retention is a key focus for the immediate future to ensure consistency, staff morale and value for money and reduce our reliance on contract/consultant staff.</p> <p>Performance management within the enforcement team will be improved with the introduction of additional resources in the form of a temporary consultant/enforcement officer to progress a backlog of cases with a principle planning officer managing the team to ensure compliance with Council policies and to ensure performance targets are achieved and the enforcement service provides value for money.</p> <p><u>Monitoring</u> Only reported through Corporate Improvement Plan.</p>	
<b>Economic Development – John Foster</b> Ensuring we have clear deliverable priorities for achieving growth through economic development and regeneration by working with partners to develop a Regeneration and Economic Development Plan and collaboratively ensure there are the resources and skills required to deliver this	<b>GREEN</b>
<p>Work in relation to Economic Development and Regeneration is continuing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Maidstone Economic Business Partnership attracts 20-30 businesses at its quarterly meetings.</li><li>• The Visit Maidstone website has been redesigned and commercialised</li><li>• A new business/inward investment web site to replace Locate in Maidstone has been commissioned.</li><li>• Work is ongoing with Local Plan team through the Draft Regulation 18 stages and responding to representations.</li><li>• Regular meetings with Kent County Council together with briefing sessions with</li></ul>	

private sector members of the LEP have resulted in the submission documents to Government incorporating Maidstone's key priorities.

- Mott Macdonald have been commissioned to evaluate phase 1 and 2 of Town Centre improvements and undertake an Economic Impact Assessment of the draft designs for phase 3.
- Work is underway agree designs and secure SELEP funding allocated to the widening of the Bridge Gyrotory project, Maidstone Cycle path along the river and Maidstone East station improvements.
- The Enterprise Hub has now opened.

#### Monitoring

Quarterly updates on the Economic Development Plan are included with Strategic Plan Performance reporting. The Enterprise Hub was previously monitored as a Corporate Project.

#### **Revenues and Benefits – Steve McGinnes**

Preparing and planning for the effects of national welfare reforms, analysing the impact of the localised Council Tax and business rate schemes, maximising the collection of business rates and exploring different ways of delivering the service for the future e.g. joint Fraud initiative

**GREEN**

Universal Credit – The number of claims for universal credit remains low with no identifiable impact to date. The programme for further roll out is yet to be confirmed.

Wider Welfare Changes – The service is working with key stakeholders through a multi-agency welfare reform group to analyse the wider welfare changes recently announced, to include:

- Reduction in the Benefit Cap
- Freeze of certain benefit rates for 4 years
- Introduction of new living wage
- Restriction to backdating of housing benefit
- Reduction in the earnings threshold for tax credits & increase in taper
- Withdrawal of the family premium within housing benefit
- Removal of housing support for 18-21 year olds
- Support through housing benefit and tax credits to 2 children

Commercial opportunity / debt recovery - The service expects to start trialling the new service in December 2015, with a go live date of March 2016.

Reducing fraud & error – A business case has been developed aimed at reducing fraud and error within the council tax and business rate system through the creation of an MKIP fraud team, with support through the precepting authorities. A decision is to be taken by the P&R Committee on the 23 September with the service to go live from March 2016.

#### **Housing – John Littlemore**

Reducing the number of people and days spent in temporary accommodation and improving the amount and the diversity of housing supply, including in the private rented sector

**GREEN**

Over 600 decisions were made during 2014/15 (388 in 2013/14). 256 households in 2014/15 were accommodated for 12,688 nights in temporary accommodation. Overall, the average length of stay dropped from 62 days in April 2014 to 40 in March 2015. More than 620 families were housed into affordable homes last year. An additional 45 families were housed via the Home Finder schemes into the private rented sector and another 11 households' homelessness duty was ended.

Quarter One of 2015/16 continues to show high numbers of people approaching the

council as homeless, with 135 decisions being made, 90% of these cases were decided within the 33 working day guideline, with the average time to make a decision being 19 days. The number of people in temporary accommodation continues to rise, due in large part to the lack of move on accommodation available for households towards whom the main housing duty has been accepted. At the end of the quarter, 63% households in temporary accommodation fell into this cohort.

There were 2954 nights spent in temporary accommodation not owned by the council, with an average net cost per night of £41.71. This shows an increase on the average cost in 2014/15 and this is due to there being a higher number of families approaching, with family accommodation being significantly more expensive than solo accommodation. There were 1047 nights at the council's own temporary accommodation unit, Aylesbury House, at a net cost of £9.09 per night. This means that the use of Aylesbury House enabled the council to avoid costs of £34,151 in this quarter when compared with using other forms of temporary accommodation.

#### Monitoring

Quarterly updates on the Housing Strategy are included with Strategic Plan Performance reporting. Capital Housing Schemes are monitored as Corporate Projects.

#### **Finance – Ellie Dunnet**

Building an efficient service that supports the Council make informed strategic financial management decisions, manage and control budgets and commit and measure resources and investigating how this service could be delivered in the future

**GREEN**

The Agresso upgrade went live in July. This incorporated the planning and budgeting module which will be used for the preparation of 2016/17 estimates. Direct debit is now up and running and the Transformation Team review is in its initial stages although may need to be delayed due to availability of key staff. A consultation process for the finance restructure is currently underway and this will be fully implemented by 1/11/2015.

#### **Building Control – David Harrison**

Re-designing the service, diversifying work to undertake more trading rather than statutory work and investigating options for delivery of the service, in particular the viability of a public sector partnership, and developing a model for delivery for the future

**GREEN**

CMT made the decision to retain an in-house building Surveying Team on the 2nd September 2015. Next stage is for the Building Surveying Manager to head up a small team looking at cost benefits and deliverability of various service improvements identified including mobile working. A brief business plan/balance sheet is to be taken back to CMT in early November prior to staff consultation. Implementation of service improvements is planned for completion by April 2016.

#### Monitoring

Only reported as part of the Corporate Improvement Plan

#### **Environmental Services – Martyn Jeaynes**

Making the Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance services more efficient, including improving work practices and feedback to customers through use of technology

**GREEN**

The changes to the street cleansing regime, including new working patterns and team structure, have all been agreed with Members, senior management and the workforce and went live from Monday 1 June. The changes will see a greater visibility of the service with the use of more manual operatives on high profile routes around the borough, as well as responsive services being carried out at the weekend. This has been linked in with the mobile technology to enable residents to report issues and for them to be dealt with 7 days a week, ensuring quicker response times and greater customer

feedback. The project is on target to deliver £50,000 savings per annum from 2016/17.

**Customer Services - Georgia Hawkes**

**GREEN**

Redefining and achieving our customer service standards and moving to our 'digital first' customer service model by moving more contacts to our website and away from face to face visits and the telephone

In quarter 1 2015/16 visits to the Gateway have declined by 13% compared to the previous year. Most encouragingly, numbers of people being put into queues and seen by Customer Service Advisors at desks has decreased by 20%, which is the largest year on year decrease we have seen. This is due to more people being referred to use online forms, including uploading Benefits proofs, when they visit the Gateway and the provision of scanning of proofs at the meet and greet desk for those who cannot use an online form. Web visits and the use of online forms has continued to grow. Renewing a parking permit is the most recent online form to be launched; 50% of permit renewals are already being done online. Emails received by Customer Services are slightly up on the previous year, but the new contact us online form appears to have begun to reduce email numbers since its launch. Telephone calls to Customer Services have increased overall in Q1, from 45,904 to 49,103, at least in part due to calls now taken for the Planning Support shared service which were introduced in June 2014. However, calls to Council Tax were down from 9,870 to 7,644. This improvement follows the simplifying of Council Tax bills, which led to around one third fewer people contacting us after they had received their bills, and simplifying other commonly used Council Tax letters.

The move of our self-serve online forms onto the Achieve forms platform and away from the Northgate customer relationship management system has meant that we have been able to cancel our support contract with Northgate, which has saved approx. £25K per year.

Monitoring

This is also reported to CLT quarterly as one of the Council's corporate projects.

**MKIP shared services and operational model – Paul Taylor**

**AMBER**

Working with partners, in particular our MKIP local authority partners, to establish closer working arrangements and partnerships in more services, as well looking at all the services we share and deciding on and delivering the best operational model for the future

Generally the MKS services are continuing to perform well. In terms of Planning Support, initial issues with the implementation of the iDox ICT system and performance in the shared Planning Support service have improved significantly and improvement work is continuing. However, the three authorities have decided to review the membership of the shared service going forward.

Current project work includes refining the commissioning model for IT services, exploring the business case for a shared Debt Recover service, planning for the implementation of the Transformation Challenge Award and reviewing the Planning Support partnership.

A joint bid from MKIP authorities for Department of Communities and Local Government Transformation Challenge award funding has been successful and the authorities have been awarded £569K to help take our telephony, channel shift and digital work forward.

Monitoring

Performance Reports on MKPI shared Services go the MKIP board quarterly.

**Information and knowledge management – Anna Collier**

**AMBER**

Implementing the recommendations of our external Information Management review to ensure we make more efficient, secure and smart use of information we gather and store. This includes improving our information governance

arrangements, agreeing relevant policies, improving our systems architecture and finding ways to turn information into knowledge	
<p>A number of key policies and guidance relating to Information Management have been developed. A communication plan has been drafted and which sets out the training and communication programme to officers to raise the importance of good information management and sits alongside the Information management Action plan. An Information Management Board game has been developed around FOI, DPA and EIR, which received a good reception from Unit Managers. The game is being offered out to teams to undertake as part of their team meetings.</p> <p><u>Monitoring</u></p> <p>The Information Management Group quarterly monitors Information Management, quarterly.</p>	

<b>Income generation workstream</b>	
<p><b>Maidstone Culture and Leisure – Marcus Lawler</b> Using our cultural and leisure assets like the Museum and Mote Park better to bring in a sustainable income</p>	<b>GREEN</b>
<p>There are three major work streams in progress, currently:</p> <p>Adventure Zone – the impact analysis has been completed and the project has been formally convened.</p> <p>Parking charges in Mote Park – introducing a nominal charge for parking in the park will generate a five year contribution of £750,000 against an estimated capital requirement of £50,000. Market research and initial consultation has been undertaken showing considerable support amongst residents and park users for this project. A report is due with the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2015 recommending that they approve the project, and which contains measures to accommodate the recommendations of the Economic and Commercial Development Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>New café – the existing operator of the café has been given notice and the Council is preparing to bring the operation of the café in-house from Nov 2015. A report will be coming to Heritage Culture and Leisure in November 2015 to start the feasibility work for new infrastructure in Mote Park (Café; toilets; kiosk; etc.)</p> <p>Project governance for the three Mote Park projects is now combined.</p> <p><u>Monitoring</u></p> <p>Commercialisation is monitored as a Corporate project.</p>	
<p><b>Waste and Recycling - Martyn Jeynes</b> Working to achieve the target of 50% recycling by 2015 and making a surplus from our commercial waste service.</p>	<b>GREEN</b>
<p>In 2014/15, the Council achieved a recycling rate of over 49% and for two quarters achieved over 50%. The recycling of paper, card, cans, plastic and glass contributed to over 60% of this figure and is continuing to increase. Therefore, the Council is on track to exceed 50% in 2015/16 and is working towards a target of 60% by 2019/20. Funding has been received from the Department of Communities and Local Government for a recycling incentive scheme for the next 2 years, which will focus on improving participation in the food waste service as this, has tailed off over the past few years.</p>	

Commercial waste is continuing to grow steadily with over 290 customers Work is also being undertaken to identify additional services we are able to offer to customers such as bulky waste collections and the team is currently undertaking a study to identify additional materials that could be collected and recycled.

#### Monitoring

Updates on the Waste & Recycling Strategy are reported quarterly as part of the Strategic plan performance report.

#### **Corporate Support – David Tibbit**

Investigating whether our Print services could be a viable commercial service and/or whether our Corporate Support services could be shared with local authority partners

**AMBER**

The service has made good progress in capturing work that had previously been carried out by external printers, reducing costs compared with 2013/14 by £45,000 or 30%, therefore adopting a commercial approach and providing better value for the Council. Examples include the printing of poll cards and canvass literature internally and the printing of council tax and business rates bills.

The issues with print management software which restricted the resources available to further develop a commercial offering, appear to have been overcome. However, the concerns over the ability of the print room staff to deliver a customer focused commercial operation remain. The Commercial Programme Manager did not have the capacity to assist the Corporate Support team this year so the focus of the team has been on the successful implementation of the print and post room solution which has resulted in a saving of £20,000, or 30%, in internal printing costs.

#### **Bereavement Services – Sharon Brown**

Exploring options for delivery, introducing more efficient working practices and expanding the offer at the Crematorium

**GREEN**

We have worked with Transformation Team and have implemented recommendations

- Have carried out further amendments to the forms to further negate confusion and to improve the data we gather for each cremation
- Have managed to convert Dignity Group to on line booking. Data is being gained to ascertain impact on number of phone calls received. Co-op have been visited and had training on the on-line booking so the process has started with them.

Pet Crematorium - Instruction has been passed to Property to commission a project manager to allow the planning process to get underway. Part of the proposed location has been cleared of low level foliage to allow better visualisation of what can be achieved in this area. Should planning permission be approved the project will then continue and it is hoped that this new venture can be open for business in 2016-17.

Business Continuity - We have managed to secure spend to save funding to allow us to employ a full time team member for 12 months to input the historical burial data for Maidstone Cemetery. From this we can then see about offering a search facility to allow families to track their loved ones that are buried at the Cemetery, this could be a revenue earner in the future.

In addition, a new Birdbath memorial that allows plaque dedication has been delivered and installed in the cloister area with a sample plaque on it so customers can visualise the product better.

#### **Commercialisation – Marcus Lawler**

**GREEN**



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Project governance for the three Mote Park projects is now combined.

## Asset Management workstream

### Integrated Transport Strategy – Cheryl Parks

Adopting our Integrated Transport Strategy and delivering this to ensure the infrastructure is in place to support the development proposed by the Core Strategy and to address some existing traffic congestion issues

**AMBER**

On the back of the updated VISUM modelling, local plan transport policies were agreed by SPS&T Committee in September. The majority will be banked for the soundness consultation on the whole plan, but changes to the Park and Ride policies will be the subject of further public consultation during October 2016. The allocations at Linton Crossroads, and Old Sittingbourne Road (M20 J7) are proposed to be deleted from the plan.

MBC has also commissioned some further specialist transport work through consultants Mott MacDonald and this work is on-going. The work will examine potential solutions for improvements to public transport movement on the A274 corridor.

All of the existing and new work will be drawn together to facilitate an updated Integrated Transport Strategy which will be finalised over the coming months. Further engagement with the Joint Transportation Board will be sought to consolidate the discussions at officer level between MBC and KCC.

### Monitoring

Quarterly updates are included as part of the Strategic Plan Performance Report and monthly to the Local plan Project Board.

### Major assets review – David Tibbit

Reviewing the Council's major assets as part of the Asset Management Plan to make savings and/or maximise income potential. This includes considering long term options for Council accommodation in the town centre, looking at the future use of the Town Hall, exploring options for the King Street, Medway Street and Brunswick Street car park sites, as well as improving and maximising income from the Park Wood industrial estate.

**AMBER**

Funding of various workstreams in connection with short and long term office accommodation strategy was approved by Cabinet in 2014/15. Short term projects of relocation of the contact centre, development of the "Business Terrace" and other

aspects of the optimisation of Maidstone House are complete. Rent reviews, lease renewals and lease extensions at Park Wood Industrial Estate are progressing, where the terms of the leases allow, using external advisors to ensure best value.

Cabinet has agreed funding of £5K for a feasibility study of the redevelopment of the Brunswick Street site.

We are also following a policy of reletting property, when it becomes vacant, on improved terms, subject to market rents, instead of disposal.

#### **Commercial property investment – David Tibbit**

Increasing our property portfolio by identifying and purchasing secondary property market options and converting the Chillington Street building for residential use

**AMBER**

Chillington House has been converted to four flats, and is available for letting.

We were successful in buying the head lease for the Phoenix Park estate on the Park Wood Industrial Estate, thus benefiting from occupational rents and the longer term aim of redevelopment of the estate.

Other opportunities are being explored.

Looking forward, the rising property market could lead to the yield from investment reducing to a level that barely covers borrowing costs, with asset appreciation being the main return.

### **Empowerment and self-sufficiency workstream**

#### **Right to bid, right to challenge and community asset transfer – David Tibbit & Sarah Robson**

Investigating which assets and services might be appropriate to be delivered by the community through the 'Right to Bid' and establishing an effective mechanism and approach for supporting the transfer of community assets where this is appropriate, demonstrating value for money and maximising their use

**AMBER**

Village pubs and village shops have been the most popular assets being put forward as nominations for Community Right to Bid, demonstrating not only the economic use, but the social benefit of local assets to local areas. Take up of Community Right to Bid has been slow, although most bids have been accepted and approved. Going forward, it would be useful to identify if an area is developing a neighbourhood plan and has designated an asset as 'for community use', how it demonstrates its value to the local community, which would give the site additional weight in decision making.

#### **Digital inclusion - Ellie Kershaw**

Working with partners to identify the geographical areas and communities that are most likely to be digitally excluded and work with them to identify solutions. This could mean increasing or signposting publically accessible computers, running training courses or accessing cheap computer schemes

**AMBER**

Two main strands of work have been identified:

- Increase people's awareness of the benefits of the internet and have the skills and facilities to access it.
- Develop initiatives to support and facilitate the provision of digital inclusion, ensuring that resources are maximised and complementary.

As part of the recent restructure of Housing and Community Services, the Housing and Inclusion team will pursue the establishment of a forum, addressing issues within



existing policies, procedures and practices that enable the borough's residents to become empowered to tackle barriers to digital inclusion and provide greater opportunities for accessing work, housing and benefits, consumer choice and social inclusion.

A report was provided to CLT on 28<sup>th</sup> July concerning the future direction of and funding for this project. This project is under review as part of the recent staff changes within the Service. A further options report will be given to CLT by the end of November.

**Financial inclusion - Ellie Kershaw**

Working with partners to improve financial awareness and identify solutions to reduce the impact of financial exclusion. Financial inclusion is the ability of an individual, household or group to access appropriate financial services or products. There are a number of barriers to financial inclusion including debt problems, fuel poverty, poor financial knowledge, no affordable credit and low income. Those most likely to be financially excluded include people over 60, young adults, single parents, people with disabilities and people on low and insecure incomes

**GREEN**

The commencement phase of the project has now completed with the establishment of the working group. With the departure of the current post-holder the opportunity was taken to review how the work stream was delivered. However, it was not possible to appoint to the new role and consideration is now being given to commissioning this work via the third sector. Together with the above, an options report on how financial inclusion can best be delivered will be presented to CLT by the end of November.

**Local flood plans – John Littlemore – Sarah Robson/Helen Miller**

Completing our investigations of how we and other local and national agencies responded to the floods in December 2013 and, over the longer term, working with Kent County Council, the Environment Agency and the Flood and Coastal Regional Committee to consider whether any flood defence schemes are viable and whether these could be pursued. Also, working with local communities at risk of being affected by flooding in the future to help them formulate local flood plans. This will help ensure that communities directly affected by flooding will be able to work together in a planned way to minimise the impact of any floods on people and their property

**GREEN**

Maidstone Council continues to work with multi agencies through the Kent Resilience Forum, especially the Environment Agency, and have contributed financially to initial investigations regarding a new catchment area for the River Beult.

During 2014/15 over 100 applications for assistance with residential flood grants and 10 business flood grants were received. The grant scheme has now closed and this work-stream has been completed.

**Organisational culture – Dena Smart**

Ensuring that staff and members can contribute to and understand their role in delivering organisational priorities. Embedding an organisational culture where staff are empowered to do their jobs through appropriate training and managerial support, where there is permission to experiment and time to learn, including looking at best practice in other organisations, and where all officers and members are engaged and are able to give their feedback and ideas. Improving collaboration between different parts of the organisation, ensuring that change is well managed and there is the capacity and capability to deliver the required outcomes. This will all contribute to our aim of achieving Investors in People (IiP) Gold by 2015.

**AMBER**

During 2014/15 the Council completed an employee engagement survey which showed

similar levels of engagement to the survey completed in 2007. One of the areas that had reduced for the first time was Well-being and there were some clear messages from staff about the work volumes being excessive. The results on Fair Deal were amongst the lowest of the factors and both these indicating that there is work to be done during the year.

There has been good progress during the last quarter with the development of the 360° manager feedback tool, this should assist our managers with an insight into the development areas that are needed and this will be supported with the management development programme and coaching.

The organisation has undergone significant change and re-structures during the year and to support these in the future we have developed a 'Change Toolkit' to assist line managers in the processes needed for change. There are likely to be additional changes within the council structure in the next few months with the departure of one of the Directors and the alignment of the structure with council priorities.

The annual appraisal process is underway which should enable us to finalise our training calendar for 2015/16 and we will ensure that this supports the development of the organisation.

There is evidence of recruitment difficulties in some of our areas of work – particularly Planning and although this problem is common across Kent it is impacting on the pressure of work in the teams.