

Recovery and Renewal Actions

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Director	Chief Executive
Lead Officers and Report Authors	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance Anna Collier, Policy and Information Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report details actions for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 public health emergency. The actions at **Appendix A** have been developed following Councillor and Officer input, including briefings, workshops and formal debate at this Committee on 23 June 2021.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee: That

1. The extensive engagement undertaken over the last 12 months on the council's approach to recovery and renewal arising from the COVID-19 pandemic be noted
2. The projects set out in **Appendix A** be agreed for the purpose of engagement with the service committees concerning a programme of investment to contribute to the objectives and Key Performance Indicators for recovery set out in Appendix B and receives a further report at its October 2021 meeting to enable feedback from committees, strategic oversight and further decision making
3. Reports be received at the next meeting and in September 2021 concerning the potential projects identified with respect to its own specific areas of responsibility.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	23 June 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	21 July 2021

Recovery and Renewal Actions

Policy and Resources Committee	29 July 2021
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	31 st August 2021
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	14 th September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	15 th September 2021
Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee	21 st September 2021
Policy and Resources Committee	20 th October 2021 and 6-monthly until October 2023

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The actions recommended align with the Council's ambitions set out in our strategic plan including the areas of focus agreed by Full Council in February 2021 for 2021-26-</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The action plan is cross-cutting and will have a positive impact on the Council's cross cutting objectives and in particular that deprivation and social mobility are reduced</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

Risk Management	The action plan has been put in place to mitigate the risks to our economy and communities and the council.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Financial	<p>In addition to the un-ringfenced grant, the Government has announced the £56 million 'Welcome Back Fund', Maidstone's allocation from this fund is £153,551.</p> <p>Several ringfenced and other grants will continue 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
Staffing	Staffing implications have been set out in the action plan where additional staffing resources are needed to deliver the projects.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Legal	<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>	Head of Mid Kent Legal Partnership

	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.	
Privacy and Data Protection	Some of the projects may require data protection impact assessments if they involve new activities and/or personal data. These will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	Some projects may need an EqIA completed.	Policy & Information Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance.
Crime and Disorder	The report includes actions that may have a positive impact in terms of crime and disorder with actions on community responsibility, resilience and levelling up	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance.
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance.
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The Committee has identified that the green agenda is important in its approval of the build back better principles, the actions will support the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy, particularly those set out within the way we work theme.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's consideration of its approach to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic commenced in June 2020. A framework of objectives and themes was agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 24 June 2020 following consultation with a politically balanced member group. It was agreed that this group would, amongst other things, provide feedback and suggestions for proposed actions for recovery ahead of these being sent to the relevant committees for decision making where this was required. One example of this was the actions to further strengthen the Council's relationship with parishes and the community and voluntary sector which was reported to the Communities Housing and Environment Committee in November 2020.
- 2.2 The Council's initial consideration of recovery was undertaken in the context of significant budgetary constraints and uncertainties. However, as part of the local government financial settlement for 2021/22 councils across the country received additional resources for addressing COVID-19 and its effects. This was reported to the Policy and Resources Committee on 10 February 2021 where it was noted that Maidstone's share of the un-ringfenced grant was £860,000. In line with government guidance, the first call on this grant was identified as for the immediate COVID-19 response in 2021/22. It was later recognised that it would be appropriate to deploy this funding to support the recovery from COVID-19 and that a further report would be brought to Policy and Resources Committee setting out the recovery strategy and likely funding requirements. As this is a one-off grant, it would not be prudent to use it to offset underlying budget pressures and it was not therefore included within the Strategic Revenue Projection. The revenue outturn for 2020/21 was better than had been feared at times during the year for the reasons set out in the 4th Quarter Finance, Performance and Risk report presented to the Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd June 2021. Given this context consideration could be given to applying the £860,000 grant to projects which would help deliver the recovery objectives, KPIs and updated areas of focus already in place.
- 2.3 Further Councillor engagement took place through a briefing held on 9 June 2021. The briefing covered:
- Updated position on the impact and effect of the pandemic
 - Themes previously agreed by Policy and Resources Committee
 - Project ideas reflecting the objectives and KPIs previously agreed

Following this, a discussion paper was presented to and debated at Policy and Resources Committee on 23 June and a follow up meeting was then held with Service Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs to continue to work on the Council's approach to recovery and renewal including a distilled list of projects.

- 2.4 From the discussions with Councillors, Build Back Better principles for Maidstone have been agreed as follows:

- **Levelling up** – Work should be focussed on communities and individuals who are most vulnerable. Projects that relate to levelling up should be based on geographical locations of communities and not limited by ward boundaries. Levelling Up provides a 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.
- **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** – Ensuring our actions are supporting the Council’s ambitions for biodiversity and climate change as set out in our Biodiversity and Climate Change Plan.
- **Building back Faster** – Whilst the Council supports the notion of ensuring we run an efficient and effective planning service as seen by the planned investment in the planning service in our action plan, development should be well planned and appropriate for the Borough.
- **Open for Business** – As the business capital of Kent to be a borough that is supportive of existing business and welcomes inward investment. This is congruent with our new Economic Development Strategy which has a priority to be Open for Business, maximising our economic role at the heart of Kent and a strong public sector base to create a positive and entrepreneurial environment in which businesses can grow and thrive. We want to maximise the opportunities presented by our place in the North Kent Enterprise Zone and the addition of the Kent Medical Campus in our borough.
- **Think Local** using our role as a facilitator and connector in the Borough to ensure our local economy is well supported. 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

The Action Plan at **Appendix A** sets out how the actions will meet these cross-cutting principles.

- 2.5 As key strategies and plans (e.g. including the Housing Strategy and Economic Development Strategy (EDS)), are renewed they will be updated to ensure they reflect the build back better principles.
- 2.6 On 10 February 2021 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and refreshed areas of focus for 2021- 26 were agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee and subsequently approved by Council. The KPIs are attached at **Appendix B** for ease of reference. Service Committees were fully engaged in the process of refreshing our areas of focus, with actions

focused on the long-term ambitions of the Council and the continued need for response to and recovery from the COVID-19 health pandemic. Changes agreed included:

- A focus on delivering those actions in the new Economic Delivery Strategy that will promote economic recovery from COVID-19
- Delivering a sustainable and vibrant leisure and cultural offer
- Working with community groups and parish councils to develop community resilience and pride in our Borough
- Promote inward investment; and
- Identifying opportunities with partners to reduce health inequalities in the Borough.

2.7 It was identified by Councillors at the workshops and at committee that funding whilst from a one-off source should be put to use in ways to ensure legacy and longevity where possible. Actions have been identified that will ensure we maximise the one-off spend to leave a legacy. For example funding our ability to leverage larger sums from key government funds such as the levelling up fund as set out as an action under the Vibrant Economy theme or pump priming projects and initiatives that can continue beyond the initial spend such as the volunteering project under the Resilient Communities theme of the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan.

2.8 Discussion has also been held on how we create greater community resilience in those areas that are unparished and may not have a well-developed or supported community infrastructure. Initiatives such as, 'Love Where you Live – Get Involved' and the community resilience fund, would allow existing community groups to flourish and new ones to be created as people come together to invest in their communities. This follows the success of the winter funding grant of just over £84,000 which was made available to community and voluntary sector organisations to bid for grants to provide access to food and warmth (fuel) for the most vulnerable in the Borough. The scheme allowed a number of community organisations to bid for small grants that they then utilised to provide, clothing, grab and go bags to feed families, equipment to cook hot meals, vouchers for community shops, supermarkets and food parcels as well as funding to pay fuel bills.

2.9 Introducing/encouraging neighbourhood forums had been identified in discussions with Councillors as a way of building resilience in non-parished areas, it was noted that in the past these have proved to be unsuccessful. A governance review is planned in 2023 to consider Parish Council arrangements following the local government boundary review, at this point new Parish Councils in our urban areas may emerge or be identified. We may also see new groups coming together to apply for grants such as "Love where you Live – Get Involved".

2.10 An Action Plan at **Appendix A** has been developed for Recovery and Renewal with the following themes:

- Vibrant Economy
- Community Resilience

- The Way we Work
- Responding to Increased Demands

The plan includes committee responsibility, senior officers and resources required.

- 2.11 As identified in the plan Service Committees will have responsibility for matters that fall within their terms of reference. Policy and Resources Committee will have strategic oversight and progress will be reported six monthly to this Committee.
- 2.12 It should be noted that the Council has existing responsibilities in relation to responding the Pandemic if the current surge continues this may result in an increased demand on support for those affected by COVID-19. The Action Plan is such that not all work will commence at the same time, nor will it require the total resource to be allocated and spent immediately as such if further resources were required to respond to the pandemic, actions and spending could be paused and adjusted and reported to this Committee to ensure the Council remains in a state of readiness to respond.
- 2.13 The Council is currently undertaking a number of initiatives in response to the pandemic including:
- Maintaining a community hub and helpline,
 - Identifying and supporting financially vulnerable people
 - Initiatives to re-open the high street safely including digital campaigns and promotions to encourage visitors
 - Making the best use of the Homelessness Prevention Grant to enable households to remain in their homes.
 - COVID-19 compliance checks
 - Agile working

We have previously reported on our response to the pandemic and these reports are listed as background documents.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 There are four options open to the Committee:

1. Approve the Action Plan at Appendix A with a six monthly reporting process

The Recovery and Renewal Action Plan has been developed collaboratively with Councillors through an iterative process, it builds on the Council's previous work on response, renewal and recovery and the work carried out to refocus our Strategic Plan.

2. Amend and Approve the Action Plan at Appendix A, with a six monthly reporting process

The plan has been developed through an iterative process and can be further refined, developed changed in accordance as deemed appropriate by the Committee

3. Approve the action plan for submission to Service Committees for more detailed review and input prior to decision by this Committee in October 2021

Whilst the plan has been developed collaboratively it may be that the Committee wished for input from each Service Committee on a more formal basis. This would involve a report to each Service Committee on the suggested actions and budget proposals so these can be returned as a series of bids and proposals for Policy and Resources to approve. The next round of meetings for the Service Committees will not conclude until the end of September so proposals will come forward in a single report to Policy and Resources in October.

4. Do not approve the plan

The Committee could in effect decide to take no action, there is however a significant amount of funding to be utilised for recovery and renewal and to do nothing would mean this resource is not utilised and the Council could not as easily take advantage of the opportunities and mitigate the impact as a result of COVID-19.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Recovery and Renewal Action Plan has been developed collaboratively with Councillors through an iterative process, it builds on the Council's previous work on response, renewal and recovery and the work carried out to refocus our Strategic Plan. The Committee are recommended to take forward Option 3 to allow input from the Service Committees.

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. The Council's corporate risk register contains risks relating to the pandemic the actions proposed will mitigate the risks.

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, and stimulated discussion on what to 'Build Back Better' would mean for Maidstone, this was followed by a discussion paper on 23 June 2021 and a workshop with the Service Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs all of this feedback has been taken into account in the development of the actions for recovery and renewal.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The next steps are dependent on the option taken forward if an action plan is approved as per options 1 and 2 then the next steps will be for the action plan to be communicated to all staff through all staff briefings. Senior responsible officers will commence work as indicated on the plan. Service Committees will provide oversight and direction as required.
- 7.2 If Option 3 is approved then reports will be developed based on the agreed themes and areas of action to be presented to the next meetings of the Service Committee, with each committee considering and developing the areas as identified in the action plan. Proposals will then be submitted by the Service Committees for consideration by Policy and Resources in October, work will then commence on the actions when approved including communication.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following document is to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Recovery and Renewal Action Plan
- Appendix B: Recovery and Renewal Key Performance Indicators

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>

23 June 2021: Recovery and Renewal Discussion Paper

<http://app07:9080/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=577&MIId=4624&Ver=4>