

Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Alison Broom, Chief Executive
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy Communications and Governance Georgia Hawkes, Head of Transformation and Property Steve McGinnes, Director of Mid Kent Services Bal Sandher, Head of Mid Kent HR John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development Anna Collier, Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report details proposed actions for recovery and renewal from the COVID-19 public health emergency that relate to the Policy and Resources Committee's terms of reference. The actions at Appendix A have been developed following Councillor and Officer input, including briefings, workshops and formal debate at a previous Policy and Resources Committee.

Purpose of Report

Discussion and Recommendation: For the Committee to provide feedback along with other committees for consideration at the next Policy and Resources Committee meeting in October.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Consider the actions at appendices A, B and C and agree feedback to be taken as part of the wider discussions at the Policy and Resources Committee on 20 October 2021.

Timetable

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

Recovery and Renewal Action Plan

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<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>	<p>Head of Policy Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<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>	<p>Head of Policy Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Risk Management</p>	<p>The action plan has been put in place to mitigate the risks to our economy and communities and the council.</p>	<p>Head of Policy Communications and Governance</p>
<p>Financial</p>	<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</p>	<p>Section 151 Officer & Finance Team</p>

	<p>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> <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</p>	Legal Team

	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.	Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Team
Equalities	Some projects may need an EQIA, these will be completed prior to activities commencing.	Corporate Insight, Communities and Governance Team 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.
- 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 is 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 and an Action Plan developed which meets the cross-cutting principles.

2.5 It was identified by Councillors at the workshops and at committee that whilst funding was from a one-off source, it 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.

2.6 An Action Plan 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 has been considered by Policy and Resources Committee and this Committee is now asked to consider those actions that fall within its terms of reference and provide comment to Policy and Resources Committee.

- 2.7 Policy and Resources Committee have strategic oversight for recovery and renewal and progress on the final plan will be reported to the Committee on a six-monthly basis.
- 2.8 It should be noted that the Council has existing responsibilities in relation to responding the Pandemic and if the current surge continues this may result in an increased demand in 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.
- 2.9 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
 - Distributing grants to businesses affected by the pandemic.
- 2.10 We have previously reported on our response to the pandemic and these reports are listed as background documents.
- 2.11 There are three appendices to the report containing more information on the actions for this Committee's consideration:
- Appendix A – All the Actions assigned to P&R
 - Appendix B – Financial Inclusion Strategy
 - Appendix C – Town Centre Strategy

Open for Business and Ready to Bid for Funding

- 2.12 The new Economic Development Strategy includes a priority to be open for business. Within this priority is an action to "Consider investing in industrial and warehouse premises to help de-risk new employment sites coming forward". The Council has also identified this as an area of action in the Strategic Plan and the new levelling up principle of "Maidstone's Open for Business". The proposal is for this to be developed and funded as part of the capital programme. A second action has been included to create the capacity to develop projects and bids for funding for example the levelling up fund and future towns fund. This is to fund specialist knowledge and advice that we cannot resource currently. Funding has been identified from the business rates pool for a fixed term post to support recovery and renewal work more widely by the Economic Development Team. This item will also be considered by Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee as well prior to being reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in October

Community Engagement

- 2.13 Over the past six years the Council has reduced the cost of undertaking consultation by bringing the service in house, at the same time increasing the quality, consistency and response rates. This has enabled the Council to demonstrate informed decision making. Whilst this has been a positive step it is recognised that there is a need provide residents with opportunities to more easily contribute and engage beyond the structure of consultation via surveys and focus group activity.
- 2.14 It is proposed to invest in a community engagement system to enable residents to have a broader overview of and contribute to Council projects in a digital space, whilst also providing officers and Members an immediate picture of public opinion. Projects such as the Town Centre Strategy can benefit from a central digital space which residents can contribute to and refer to for regular updates, reducing the need to directly contact the Council.

The Way We Work

- 2.15 The changing working practices caused by Covid-19 have required the council to consider the workforce culture and technology required for the future within the Way we Work theme. Alongside this work the Council is also developing a digital strategy to ensure we take a rounded approach responding to customers changing needs and maximising the opportunities available to us. This will also include looking at how the Council supports digital inclusion. The Digital Strategy will be brought separately to Policy and Resources Committee. The council wants to ensure that the organisational culture has the capacity to deliver high performing services to embrace innovation and creativity as well as new ways of working. The work we have started in creating a more agile way of working will also require a culture change programme to support and get the most out of the new ways of working.
- 2.16 The outcome of this project will include ensuring that:
- Employees have the right blend of skills and knowledge
 - Leadership behaviours/competencies align with the desired culture
 - We make service delivery decisions at the appropriate level

Data Analytics

- 2.17 In March 2020 the Council advanced plans to explore the development of performance dashboards to enable monitoring of service performance and COVID-19 cases within the borough throughout the pandemic.
- 2.18 Following successful delivery as a proof of concept, a programme of dashboard development across the authority has been produced and started and seven dashboards have already been developed. These are for:
- Community Safety

- Customer Services
- Development Control
- Information Management
- Planning Enforcement
- Street Cleansing
- Waste Crime

2.19 The performance dashboards have proved a significant benefit for these services, enabling them to swiftly monitor performance, identify trends and plan service delivery across the team, without spending officer time producing reports and undertaking analysis. They also enhance strategic oversight by the Corporate Leadership Team.

2.20 The development of dashboards can be technically complicated and time consuming. Therefore, additional resource is required to invest in order to deliver the programme for the benefit of other teams as well as shape new dashboards for Members and customers.

Financial Inclusion

2.21 Attached at Appendix B is a proposed financial inclusion strategy for 2021-26. The Strategy has been developed building on previous decisions for example the debt recovery procedures and support for low income households and linked financial inclusion projects already in place. The strategy contains an action plan for financial inclusion with 4 workstreams. In order to deliver this plan successfully there is a need to employ a dedicated resource (additional post grade 7-8) to focus on the agenda and ease some of the pressures on the team. The need for a strategy and to define our approach to financial inclusion has been heightened because of the low levels of financial resilience in the Borough following austerity, welfare reform and then the impact of the pandemic which has increased the support needed for our most vulnerable residents. If we successfully deliver the strategy over the next five years, we will have achieved:

- A coordinated approach across the Council, voluntary sector and key partners to address the underlying causes and impacts of poverty
- A data led approach to identify and target coordinated support to residents in financial crisis or at risk of moving into financial crisis
- A reduction in the number of households living in fuel, water or food poverty
- A reduction in the number of households at risk of eviction or struggling with Council Tax debt because of financial difficulties
- Increased awareness and take up of mainstream financial services amongst low income households
- An increase in the income for those on the lowest income within the borough by ensuring they receive the benefits they are entitled to

2.22 The Citizens Advice Bureau, a key provider of debt advice within Maidstone has reported the loss of a critical income stream (£53,000) following a change in the commissioning of debt and money advice through the Money and Pension Service. The change, which it is understood places a greater

emphasis on more centralised, generic, phone based debt advice and sign posting creates a risk for residents through the loss of specialist and ongoing 1 to 1 debt advice for residents with complex needs/debt issues. The Citizens Advice Bureau has received 263 referrals for debt advice since January 2021, including 53 referrals from Maidstone Borough Council.

- 2.23 Whilst the council currently funds the Citizens Advice Bureau to the value of £133,100 per annum and plans to undertake a further procurement of advice services in advance of the current service level agreement expiring in March 2022, the provision of specialist debt advice is a key element within the financial inclusion strategy and the wider covid recovery plans. It is proposed that officers continue to work with the Citizens Advice Bureau to explore alternative funding options, including scope for the council to provide additional short term funding to maintain the existing specialist service whilst the Citizens Advice Bureau work to identify an alternative funding source or method of delivering the service.

Town Centre Strategy

- 2.24 The Town Centre Strategy will be designed to establish, and provide clarity around, the Council's long-term vision and aspirations for the Town Centre and to develop a multi-faceted and multi-agency strategy and delivery plan designed to achieve this. The work will be underpinned by core principles which reflect the vision for both a County Town and business capital of the county at the Heart of Kent and a borough with vibrant and prosperous urban and rural communities where everyone can realise their potential and fulfil their aspirations. Appendix C provides more detail on the Town Centre Strategy setting out the scope of the strategy, workstreams and documents, political leadership, communication and engagement and an indication of the resources required. A significant shortfall has been identified which could be funded via the recovery and renewal resource, S106 monies and underspend from previous financial years.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to consider the actions for recovery and renewal that are outlined in Appendix A for comment. The Committee is asked to comment on the proposals and make recommendations as appropriate.

4. RISK

- 4.1 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.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 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

5.2 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.

5.3 A report was taken to Policy and Resources on the 21 July 2021 where the projects and actions for recovery and renewal were agreed for the purpose of engagement with the service committees.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 Proposals will be considered by all four Service Committees before being considered by Policy and Resources in October. Work will then commence on the actions when approved, including communication.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Recovery and Renewal Actions
- Appendix B: Financial Inclusion Strategy
- Appendix C: Town Centre Strategy

8. 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?CId=577&MId=4624&Ver=4>

21 July 2021: Recovery and Renewal Actions Report to Policy and Resources
<http://10.201.64.164/documents/s77897/Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Actions.pdf>