

Corporate Strategy 2025-2035

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Climate Transition, Corporate and Environmental Services Policy Advisory Committee	07/01/2025
Planning and Healthier Stronger Communities Policy Advisory Committee	08/01/2025
Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee	14/01/2025
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	21/01/2025
Cabinet (Leader of the Council)	05/02/2025
Council	19/02/2025

Will this be a Key Decision?	Yes
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	COUNCIL
Lead Director	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance Anna Collier, Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report sets out the Mission, Priorities and Outcomes for the new Corporate Strategy 2025-35. The new Corporate Strategy is included at Appendix 1.

The report includes information on how the document has been drawn together including the results of consultation and feedback at Appendix 3.

An action plan for year 1 is included at Appendix 2, which shows impact of the priorities on the budget for 2025/26.

A further prioritisation of actions will occur in March following the recent government announcement on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Purpose of Report

Decision

The report makes the following recommendation to the Council:

That the Corporate Strategy and Year 1 Action Plan be approved.

Corporate Strategy 2025-2035

1. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

Timeline of Strategic Plan Development

- 1.1 The Corporate Strategy is a core element of our corporate planning. The priorities and outcomes in the Corporate Strategy are developed alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to ensure consistency between priorities, service delivery and budgets. Business Planning allows the Council to convert high level priorities from the Corporate Strategy into actions for each directorate, service, or team across the Council, which then feeds into individual staff priorities.
- 1.2 The current Strategic Plan was developed in 2018 and planned to run until 2045. Following the local election in May 2024, the Council has appointed a new Leader and they have appointed a Cabinet. The Leader and Cabinet requested that a new strategic plan be developed this year. A timetable for the development of the new Strategic Plan since renamed as the Corporate Strategy was approved by Cabinet in July following consultation with the Policy Advisory Committees.
- 1.3 Informal Cabinet meetings were held in July and August to develop the new priorities and actions for the Corporate Strategy, initial meetings were facilitated by the Local Government Association with Corporate Leadership Team participation. These were followed with workshops with the leads for topics from the Wider Leadership Team facilitated by the Head of Insight, Communities and Governance.

Consultation

- 1.4 Resident engagement was undertaken between 6 September and 20 October 2024 to inform the budget, assess satisfaction with key services and identify what matters most to our residents.
- 1.5 A survey was carried out online and by post, with a direct email to over 13,000 residents who had consented to being contacted by email. It was open to all Maidstone Borough residents aged 18 years and over. A mailed paper copy was sent to a sample of 5,539 households. Paper copies and QR access code were also available at engagement events. 14 engagement events were held at various locations around the borough. In addition, the survey was promoted on the Council's website, social media and in the local press.
- 1.6 A total of 4,262 people responded to the questionnaire, of which 2,884 provided age and gender information allowing these responses to be weighted in line with the population of Maidstone. Data was weighted according to the known population profile to counteract non-response bias. The weighting profile is based on the 2023 mid-year ONS population estimates. The under-representation of 18-34 year olds means that high

weights have been applied to responses in this group, therefore the results for this group should be treated with caution.

- 1.7 This is a reliable response rate and the overall results are accurate to ± 1.81 at the 95% confidence level. A confidence level is a statistical measure that tells us how certain we are about the accuracy of a survey results. This means that if we repeated the same survey 100 times, 95 out of those 100 times, the results would fall within the specified margin of error ($\pm 1.81\%$). For example, a 50% agreement rate to a question could, in reality, lie within the range of 48.19% to 51.81% confidence intervals. Response rates achieved by some authorities in our CIPFA nearest neighbour groups and by other Kent authorities are presented for information in the table below:

Authority	Response Rate (resident and budget surveys)
Maidstone	4262
Basingstoke and Deane	1,103
Ashford	1,132
Tunbridge Wells	1,507
Swale	68
Folkestone and Hythe	4
Dover	244
Thanet	259

- 1.8 The results of the resident survey can be seen in Appendix 3, the priority "A high quality place, adapted for the future" was changed to A high quality place adapted for a changing climate following consultation to reflect the ambition in this area. Key findings were:

- 'A high quality place, adapted for the future' was the highest scoring priority and 'Quality homes' was the lowest scoring priority.
- Waste Collection was found to be the 'most important' mandatory service that the Council provided (58.4%).
- The mandatory service where respondents felt spending should be increased most was Community Safety (63.2%)
- The mandatory service which respondents felt should be reduced was Democratic & Electoral Services (40.8%).
- Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has increased by 15.6%, from 50.9% in 2023 to 66.5% in 2024.
- Across the wellbeing matrix measures, there has been an improvement in the scores for anxiousness and isolation since the 2022 survey. However, the scores for life satisfaction and community/neighbour support have declined.

- 58.6% of respondents rated their health and wellbeing positively ('very good' and 'good' responses combined), since the 2022 survey the proportion answering this way has declined by 6.2 percent points.
- Mote Park had the highest satisfaction rating across the Council Services in the survey at 80.6%.
- Availability of on -street parking in the Town Centre had the lowest satisfaction rating across the Council services in the survey at 14.0%
- The Council service that has seen the greatest improvement in satisfaction was Maidstone Museums with an increase in satisfaction of 9.6 percent points.
- The Council service that had the greatest decline in satisfaction was general waste collection with a decrease in satisfaction of 16.9 percent points.
- 21.4% agreed that they could influence decision in their local area, since 2022 survey the proportion answering this way has declined by 3.7 percent points.
- When asked about participation in local decision making, 31.0% said that they wanted to know more about how decisions were taken in their area, but 'didn't want to be involved beyond that'.
- 50.2% said they felt 'very well informed' or 'fairly well informed'. Since the 2022 Resident Survey the proportion answering this way has declined by 8.7 percent points.
- The most common theme when respondents were asked what they loved about where they lived was Parks & Open Spaces.
- When asked what their biggest worry right now is - the most common theme was overdevelopment and infrastructure.

1.9 Consultation was also undertaken with partners through presentations and events. The Leader gave a presentation to Anchor Institutions on the 9 October. A presentation was given to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in November. A survey was run for the VCS and for businesses between October and November which received 57 responses (this survey asked for views on the priorities, economic and developments services and doing business/operating in Maidstone. Two business breakfast engagement were held with businesses at the Innovation Centre and at the Business Terrace. The results of these activities are included at Appendix 3.

1.10 A Member workshop was held on 14 October to review each priority theme, identifying gaps and opportunities. The following themes were identified:

- Transport/walking and cycling was a common theme across the priorities
- Behaviour Change – how do we affect and influence residents to achieve the ambitions
- Financial Risk
- Scope of control v influence
- Parks and Green Spaces
- Young people
- Events

1.11 Wider Leadership Team reviewed the draft priorities and areas of focus and provided the following feedback.

- Greater clarity and context for each priority
- Creating a positive narrative for our place
- Need for link to our business/commercial services i.e. crematorium, building control
- Clarity on affordable housing
- More actions to support adaptation
- Gypsy, Roma and traveller provision and support
- Cleansing and safety are missing

1.12 The Corporate Strategy has been reviewed by each Policy Advisory Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2025. The Committees gave a variety of feedback on the document identifying that whilst there was much to agree with there were also some issues including:

- Concern on the cost of citizen's assemblies and their value
- The loss of the 1,000 Affordable Homes target
- The use of current resources to achieve new actions in the year 1 action plan
- Concern regarding the Annual Parish Conference
- Rights of Nature
- The actions for nature recovery and the governance of the spend
- Prioritising the leisure centre
- Whether 2030 was a realistic deadline for net zero given the likelihood of achieving the ambition
- The need to prioritise actions in light of local government reorganisation

Cabinet considered the feedback regarding 1,000 affordable homes, whilst 1,000 affordable homes was a call to action it wasn't felt to be ambitious enough instead they have agreed to update the "Quality Homes" priority to "Quality Homes for All" – to reflect the call to action and ambition in this area. The nature recovery programme of work will be shared with the relevant Policy Advisory Committee for oversight and review. Following the recent whitepaper from Government regarding

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, Cabinet and the Corporate Leadership Team will be reviewing the priorities for the Council for the next 18 months. This will be through facilitated sessions with the Local Government Association.

Priorities

1.13 Cabinet reviewed the feedback provided by residents, members, partners, businesses, and senior officers and on the basis of the feedback have reshaped the areas of focus and developed a year one action plan. The draft strategy can be seen at Appendix 1. The revised draft priorities have been amended to "A High Quality Place, Adapted for the future" to "A High Quality Place Adapted for a Changing Climate" and "Quality Homes" to "Quality Homes for All" they are outlined with their context below.

- **A High Quality Place, Adapted for a Changing Climate.** Maidstone is a place of rich history and natural beauty. We are committed to preserving this heritage and creating a sustainable future for generations to come. This priority focuses on protecting and enhancing our environment, from our urban centre to our rural landscapes and villages. We will address pressing environmental challenges, investing in green infrastructure, improving public spaces, and promoting sustainable transport. We will take a collaborative approach with residents, businesses, and community groups, to create a vibrant and sustainable place for everyone to enjoy.
- **Resilient Communities.** Our strong and resilient communities are the foundation of our thriving borough. We will empower residents, foster local partnerships, and address social and economic challenges including poverty, to create a borough where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. This priority focuses on working with the voluntary and community sector to strengthen communities. We will address health inequalities, ensuring our residents are heard and services are accessible to all.
- **Quality Homes for All.** A safe, warm, and comfortable home is essential for the wellbeing of our residents and the basis of a resilient community. This priority focuses on enhancing the quality and availability of housing options across the borough, that anyone can afford to pay for. By investing in new affordable housing, implementing robust homelessness prevention strategies, and raising standards within the private rented sector, we will ensure everyone has access to a secure, high-quality, and affordable home.
- **Fairer Economy for People and Planet.** A fairer economy will ensure that people's needs are met without harming the environment. This priority focuses on creating a more sustainable and equitable future for our borough. It represents a move away from a linear 'take, make, consume and throw-away society', towards one that minimises waste of energy and resources, reduces pollution, keeps products and materials in

use for as long as possible and supports the regeneration and protection of natural resources.

1.14 The year one action plan can be seen at Appendix 2 and actions are reflected in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

1.15 The table below sets out the relevant priorities for each Policy Advisory Committee, feedback was focused on the areas relevant to each Committee's remit.

Policy Advisory Committee	A High-Quality Place, Adapted for a Changing Climate	Resilient Communities	Quality Homes	Fairer Economy for People and Planet
Climate Transition, Corporate And Environmental Services	X			X
Housing And Community Cohesion		X	X	
Planning And Healthier Stronger Communities	X	X		X

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND WHY NOT RECOMMENDED

2.1 Amend the Corporate Strategy.

Following consideration of all the feedback the Council could decide to amend the document and approve an amended version, however it would be difficult to achieve in a single meeting and may not reflect the priorities of the new administration and the subsequent change to allocation of resources.

2.2 Do not recommend a new Corporate Strategy.

The current strategy (strategic plan as was) finishes in 2045 so the Council could recommend that the current document remain in place. It does not, however, reflect the priorities of the new administration and the subsequent change to allocation of resources.

2.3 Draft a new version of the strategy.

This would be difficult to achieve in a single meeting, so it would be unlikely that a new plan and vision would be in place.

3. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix 1: Corporate Strategy 2025-35
 - Appendix 2: Year One Action Plan
 - Appendix 3: Resident Survey Report
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4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None