

**Maidstone Community Strategy
2009 – 2020**

Your community, our priority

Refreshed July 2013

1. Foreword by Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of Maidstone Borough Council



Welcome to Maidstone's Community Strategy. This strategy draws on the aspirations of residents, businesses, the community, faith and voluntary sectors. It addresses the biggest challenges and opportunities facing us.

The aim of this strategy is to improve the quality of life for everyone. This strategy sets out our ambitions for the borough and what we want Maidstone to be like in 2020. It is important that people feel proud about where they live and that they have a sense of belonging and responsibility for the area. It also identifies how we will tackle the wider economic, environmental and social issues associated with worklessness to achieve a thriving and prosperous borough.

Maidstone is a great place in which to live, work, visit and do business. We want to make it even better. Our community is at the heart of everything we do. We have excellent community relations in Maidstone and we will work to extend this and build an even more cohesive community that shares and enjoys all that Maidstone has to offer.

Our central focus is to enable sustainable economic growth, in order to create new opportunities for Maidstone's communities thereby reducing the number of people not in work. We recognise this will be more challenging given the recent economic downturn. However, we are passionate in our belief that worklessness is a major barrier to success and a key factor in poverty and exclusion. There is a clear link between worklessness, poor health and education standards, low aspirations, higher crime and communities which are less integrated. Tackling worklessness therefore is our key focus and together we can and will steer the borough in a positive direction.

I am confident that our refreshed strategy creates the opportunities for sharing good ideas, support and resources helping to make stronger communities. I look forward to working with you all to ensure that Maidstone becomes even better over the next decade.

Councillor Chris Garland

Leader of Maidstone Borough Council

July 2013

2. Introduction

2.1 Duty of the council to produce a sustainable community strategy

The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on every local authority to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The purpose of the Strategy is to set the overall strategic direction and long-term vision for the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of a local area – typically 10-20 years – in a way that contributes to sustainable development in the UK. It tells the 'story of the place' – the distinctive vision and ambition of the area, being based on the priorities identified in the plans and strategies of all the partner organisations working within the area. In Maidstone, our strategy is called Maidstone Community Strategy – your community, our priority.

2.2 What is a sustainable community?

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the needs of existing and future generations, are environmentally sensitive and contribute to a high quality of life. A sustainable community is one which allows people to have a say in the way their own neighbourhood is run. They are also safe and inclusive, well planned and offer equal opportunities and good services for all.

2.3 How we developed this strategy

At the start of the process to develop the original strategy we embarked upon a consultation process. These views, together with the considerations of local partners and your elected council representatives, coupled with what we know about Maidstone, are set out in the rest of this document under the three priorities. At the end of the document you can learn more about how we will measure our progress and achievements.

2.4 What matters to Maidstone residents

The Council carried out extensive consultation when developing the original Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone 2009-2020. Residents were asked to identify what was good and bad about living in the Borough as well as their dream for Maidstone. The top three positive comments related to Maidstone included shopping, parks and the river. Other positive comments related to cleanliness, the countryside and nightlife. The top three negative comments related to traffic congestion, public transport and the quality of roads. The top three dreams for Maidstone residents related to resolving transport issues, improving the river and an improved theatre/concert facility.

2.5 A residents' survey was undertaken in 2011. This was the first survey the Council had undertaken since the Place Survey in 2008 and showed improved satisfaction in a number of areas including providing value for money, keeping residents informed and the way the council runs its services. It also showed some areas that need improvement, such as people from different background getting on well together and satisfaction

with the local area. The Borough Council will work with residents to find ways to increase satisfaction across the borough.

- 2.6 During the 2012-13 refresh of Maidstone's Strategic Plan, residents were consulted on the budget to identify what matters to them in respect of council services. This exercise was factored into the Cabinet's prioritisation of spending and services. More detail is provided in the prioritisation section of the plan. The importance of the rural transport network, cleanliness of our town centre and supporting and encouraging a range of business development were identified during a resident focus group reviewing our priorities.

2.7 **How the Maidstone Community Strategy links with the Maidstone Borough Local Plan**

The Maidstone Borough Local Plan will be the strategic, spatial representation of this Strategy. Maidstone Borough Council has a clear understanding of the important contribution that partners make to the achievement of the Local Plan's objectives.

2.8 **Refreshing the Maidstone Community Strategy**

Maidstone's Community Strategy was originally launched in 2009. This revised Strategy puts forward a number of new and revised partnership objectives, framed within new strategic priorities. The overall vision of Maidstone's Community Strategy and thematic outcomes which were originally agreed through engagement with residents and analysis of local needs and intelligence, remain and are only slightly altered, through refreshed narrative and expression.

3. The local context and governance

Local context: Maidstone the place

- 3.1 Maidstone is an exceptionally green Borough with a number of parks, the largest of which is Mote Park, which is Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and home to thriving rugby and cricket clubs. There are numerous smaller parks and squares within the town and villages which have benefited from a major playground and sports facility investment programme in recent years. We recognise the importance of maintaining a quality environment for residents including our heritage and conservation areas. The attractive countryside offers high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities.
- 3.2 Maidstone Borough is considered a good place to live and work with high rates of employment, relatively low levels of adults claiming incapacity benefits and a higher proportion of residents who have a degree than the South East average.
- 3.3 Larger numbers of people commute into than out of the Borough. The Borough has a very mixed business sector with large numbers of small

and medium size businesses with particular strengths in professional services (law and accountancy) and construction. There is a growing media industry led by Maidstone Studios and the Kent Messenger Group. Maidstone has an extensive further education campus (Mid Kent College) and a higher education offer with both the University for the Creative Arts and Mid Kent College seeking to increase their range of courses and facilities. Mid Kent College is widening the range of courses and facilities it provides as part of a £23 million redevelopment of Maidstone' Oakwood Park Campus. This major project commenced in 2012/13 and the College is one of just a handful of UK further education colleges currently investing in a major capital scheme. Over the next three years the University for Creative Arts will be expanding the broadcast media courses being delivered at Maidstone Studios.

- 3.4 Residents living in the Borough have relatively high wages (although many higher earners commute out of the Borough to achieve these). Maidstone came out as the top destination for business in the 2010 study of locations for business in Kent.
- 3.5 "Transport links are generally good, with rail journey times to London are around an hour or just under for some of our villages (Staplehurst, Headcorn and Marden) but over an hour from Maidstone Town itself. The international high speed railway stations at Ebbsfleet (30 mins) and Ashford (25 mins) are also extremely accessible and the Council is pleased that an extension to the Thameslink network is being proposed to provide a direct link to London from Maidstone. 2011 saw the introduction of High Speed services from the Maidstone west to St. Pancras. The Borough is well served by the motorway network with the M20 and M2 both providing links to the M25 and the Channel Ports. With regard to travelling in and around the Borough by car, congestion is an issue particularly at peak time in the town centre. The bus transport network serving Maidstone town is relatively strong whilst rural transport presents distinct challenges. Road safety is a concern for Maidstone, with the poorest record in Kent. Following a scrutiny review of road safety, the Council will be supporting the Safer Maidstone Partnership in taking initiatives forward to address this issue."
- 3.6 A report commissioned in 2010 to look at how public money is spent locally identified that £602 million public funding was spent in Maidstone in 2010 by various bodies including Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police and the local Primary Care Trust. Just over 35% of the money was spent on health and social wellbeing, nearly 17% was spent on education and 15% on housing.

Governance

- 3.7 This strategy takes its strategic direction from the Kent Recommitment, developed at county level and overseen by the Kent Council Leaders (KCL) group, which takes overall responsibility for co-ordinating and agreeing

shared priorities and progress, encouraging community leadership and supporting new initiatives across the county.

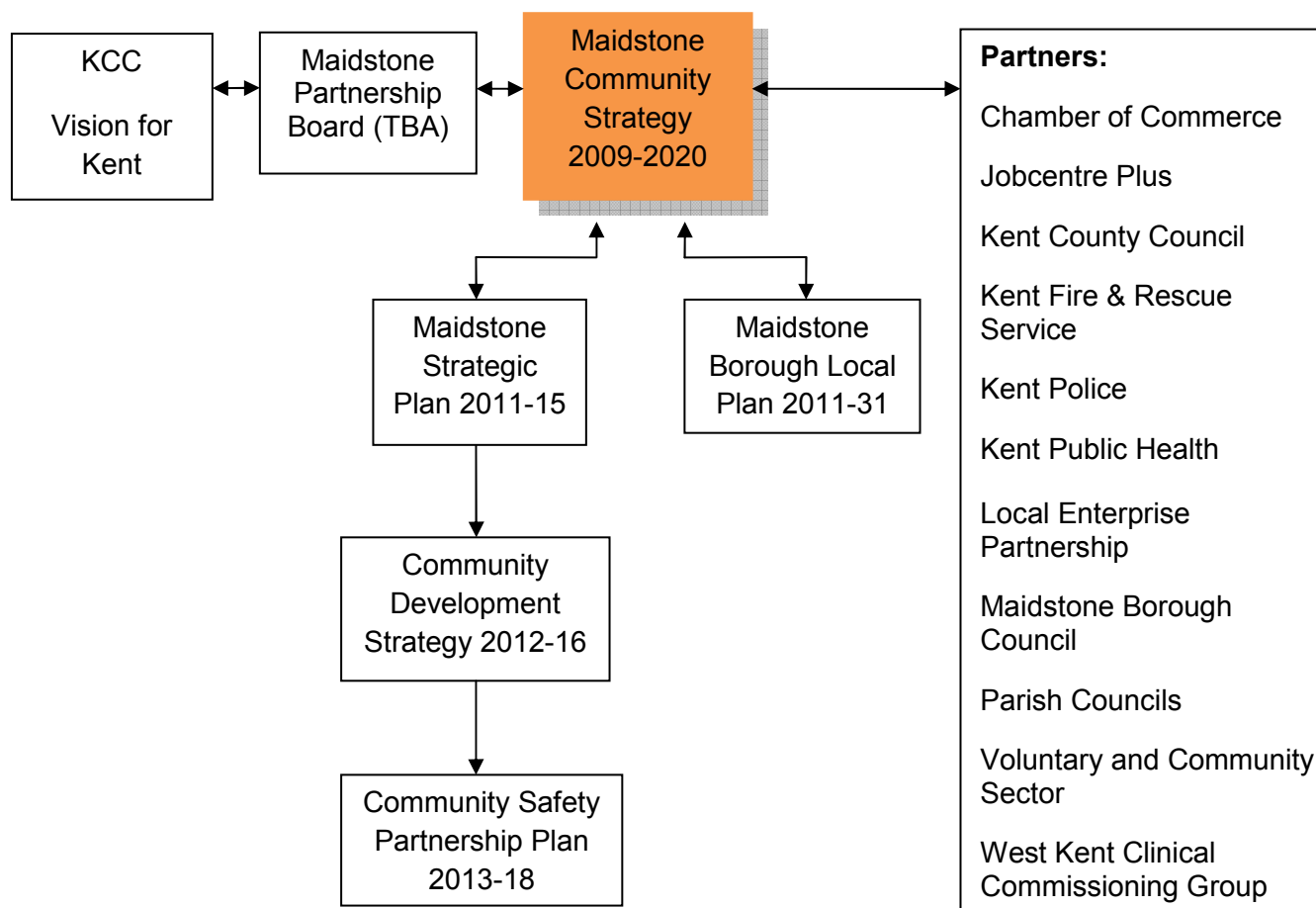
3.8 The KCL group oversees and are responsible for the delivery of the three Countywide Ambitions across Kent, which are;

- **to grow the economy** - for Kent to be 'open for business' with a growing and successful economy and jobs for all
- **to tackle disadvantage** - for Kent to be a county of opportunity, where aspiration rather than dependency is supported and quality of life is high for everyone
- **to put citizens in control** - for power and influence to be in the hands of local people so they are able to take responsibility for themselves, their families and their communities

3.9 Maidstone Borough Council has identified the following three priorities and seven outcomes to deliver the vision for Maidstone:

Priorities	Outcomes
1. For Maidstone to have a growing economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A transport network that supports the local economy • A growing economy with rising employment, catering for a range of skill sets to meet the demands of the local economy
2. For Maidstone to be a decent place to live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decent, affordable housing in the right places across a range of tenures • Continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit to Borough • Residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced
3. Corporate and Customer Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services are customer focused and residents are satisfied with them • Effective, cost efficient services are delivered across the borough

3.10 The Maidstone Community Strategy links with other plans, strategies and partners as set out below:



4. Maidstone Community Strategy: Our Vision and Priorities

- 4.1 We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, quality environment with education, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities to help people realise their aspiration.
- 4.2 Maidstone's Community Strategy sets out the long-term vision and ambitions for the borough. It is the overarching strategy for local partnerships based on the things residents told us matters to them and what we know about Maidstone. It takes account of the key challenges and opportunities facing the borough.
- 4.3 The original strategy contained eight priorities to support the vision. Working with the original Strategy and listening to the views people have shared during further consultation with the Maidstone Local Strategic Partnership and more recently, the Maidstone Locality Board, the priorities have been reduced in the new strategy to three. The new priorities will

enable greater cross working by partners across the range of issues that are faced by the borough and enhance further partnership working by developing a greater shared agenda. The priorities are:

- **Troubled Families (Community Budgets)**
- **Tackling worklessness and poverty**
- **Local environmental improvements**

5. Why are these priorities important to Maidstone?

- 5.1 Unemployment is a national issue and a particular issue for Maidstone to tackle with partners. The Government has set up programmes to work with troubled families in a number of areas and the Borough Council has adopted the approach as a tool to tackling six wards of Maidstone which have unemployment rates almost twice as high as the Kent average. The Troubled Families programme seeks to improve the lives of those households who present most problems for members of their own family as well as the communities in which they live. Often characterised by long term unemployment these households account for less than 1% of the population but can cost central and local agencies up to £330,000 per family a year.
- 5.2 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Troubled Families programme aims to transform the lives of 120,000 families nationally by 2015, with a specific focus on families experiencing issues of truancy/exclusion from school, youth offending, antisocial behaviour and worklessness. Kent County Council has identified that it will work with 2,560 families across the county over 3 years, working directly with 1,082 in Year 1. This is worth £2.89 million in an upfront attachment fee grant funding, with up to a further £0.63 million in Payments by Results funding if successful against the performance criteria. In Maidstone, the number of families meeting DCLG's Troubled Families Criteria 1 (exclusions and absences) is 896. The number of families meeting both Criteria 1 and Criteria 2 (YOS, crime and ASB) is approximately 80.
- 5.3 Maidstone has the largest economy of all Kent Districts and Boroughs. More people commute into the Borough each day than commute out. The Borough is an economic hub providing employment for a large part of Kent. However, despite its natural location advantages, Maidstone's growth rate was the 4th lowest in Kent between 1998 and 2008 and behind the South East and Great Britain averages. It is a diverse economy with reliance on town services, 30% of businesses are located in the rural area. Moreover much of this employment growth has been public sector employment. Whilst around 10,000 jobs were created in the service sector during this period, the Borough lost over 3,000 jobs in manufacturing. Neighbouring areas have been able to provide a greater choice and range of employment sites in both quality and quantum and in some cases at more competitive prices.

- 5.4 If the planned cuts in public sector expenditure of 30% result in jobs losses in the sector in the same proportion, nearly 6,000 people who work in Maidstone could lose their jobs. Maidstone also has a low wage local economy and the national changes to education and skills development will impact on our residents and employment.
- 5.5 Maidstone is perceived as an affluent rural area within commuting distance from London but this affluent backdrop tends to mask the socially excluded who often suffer low pay, lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, poor health and relative poverty. Poverty in Maidstone is not confined to urban areas and significant numbers of people in rural areas also experience hardship, with limited access to advice and advocacy appropriate to needs.
- 5.6 National policies on welfare reform and public sector budget cuts will have an impact for our deprived areas and our most vulnerable residents. This will not be an easy area to address as 11% of Maidstone's population live in areas considered to be in the 20% most deprived in the country. Our rural areas also contain households experiencing deprivation. These areas have lower standards of health and lower life expectancy than average. The disadvantaged wards have the highest numbers of young people not in education, employment or training and significantly higher numbers of young offenders.
- 5.7 Maidstone's ageing population also needs strategies and services to provide facilities which identify and promote independence and reduce isolation. The theme of local accessibility needs to be addressed for members of the community who are vulnerable or isolated due to old age, illness or disability, supporting people to live independent and active lives. As the population in the borough ages the pressure to support people will also increase. People are now living longer and this will add to the pressures faced by our health, social care and housing services.
- 5.8 The health of people in Maidstone is mixed compared to the England average. Deprivation is lower than average, however 4,455 children live in poverty. Life expectancy for men is higher than the England average. However, life expectancy is 7.2 years lower for men and 5.9 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Maidstone than in the least deprived areas (based on the Slope Index of Inequality published in January 2012).
- 5.9 The Maidstone Borough Health Profile 2012 provides an overview of the health of residents in the borough and sets out the current health priorities for Maidstone, highlighting sexual health, obesity, self-harm and smoking as key issues. Reducing health inequalities, also addresses the link between worklessness and the broader determinants of health such as housing, environment, access to good quality services and health care.
- 5.10 Reducing mental illness and promoting mental health is a key priority in the borough. Without access to good quality employment the barriers to

escape poverty are much higher for those with mental health, ill health or learning disabilities.

- 5.11 The challenge is to ensure the borough and its communities continue to prosper, whilst maintaining the health of our environment, which itself contributes to that prosperity and which is now clearly recognised as being essential to our own wellbeing. We want Maidstone to be a place where people enjoy living and a key part of this will be having access to affordable and decent housing. We understand that good housing promotes educational attainment, better health outcomes and employment opportunities. The provision of choice and affordability in housing for the citizens of Maidstone, including rural communities, which meets their needs and aspirations are addressed within this outcome. Decent means housing that meets residents' needs in terms of availability and size as well as meeting the national decent homes standard.
- 5.12 In terms of affordable housing, we are referring to a range of tenure that includes socially rented, intermediate or affordable rent and a variety of shared ownership products. We also have a role to play in improving the quality of private housing through grants for improvements to insulation and heating. Maidstone Borough Council has completed a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to help us build the right kind of homes in the right places.
- 5.13 Housing in Maidstone town has traditionally been considered relatively affordable compared to the south east average, but this is not the case in rural Maidstone and for those on average or low incomes. The recent recession has resulted in an increase in home repossession and homelessness generally has risen across the UK. Whilst Maidstone has seen a rise in the numbers of households requiring temporary accommodation provided under the homelessness legislation this remains comparably low compared to the other Boroughs in Kent and a significantly lower level than the worst affected areas in England. Maidstone continues to perform above targets for homelessness prevention and is seeking to find new ways of encouraging people to seek housing advice at an earlier stage rather than when the crisis point of homelessness is reached.
- 5.14 We are committed to increasing social responsibility to ensure that new development is of high quality and the Borough's varied and valued landscape and heritage assets are respected and the environment remains clean and attractive.

6. Three priorities; seven outcomes

6.1 This strategy's overarching priorities are;

- **Troubled Families (Community Budgets)**
- **Tackling worklessness and poverty**
- **Local environmental improvements**

Underpinning the three agreed priorities, there are seven long-term outcomes that the Borough Council aspires to achieve through a partnership approach in Maidstone:

6.2 Maidstone is a great place to do business with higher levels of investment and business growth

Through business support services, planning and skills development by 2020, we will have made Maidstone an attractive borough to establish a business. We will have supported economic growth and encouraged development and regeneration of sites across the borough. This will provide the safe, welcoming and attractive environment that businesses need to thrive. We will have increased the overall employment rate with a significant number of new jobs created across a range of industries and commercial sectors and in a wide variety of locations.

6.3 Greater wellbeing for households through higher numbers of residents in employment

In 2020 Maidstone will have a much higher employment rate. This will be achieved by ensuring all our communities have access to seamless education/training opportunities, which will in turn provide Maidstone residents with the right skills to gain employment. Further, this increase in employment will also help to lift vulnerable people out of poverty and enable them to play an active role in their community.

6.4 Even more children and young people are on the path to success through the provision of good quality education, training and jobs which reduces the risk of exclusion and offending

More of our children in 2020 will be on the path to success. We will ensure this is the case by helping them to be happy, healthy and safe. Services for children will be seamless and responsive to their needs. Early intervention and effective partnership working will ensure the safety and welfare of children. Attainment, skills and qualifications will continue to improve with more of our young people having the right qualifications to succeed in adulthood. Services for children and young people will increasingly be co-designed with more effective engagement of children, young people and families – particularly those from vulnerable and seldom heard groups.

6.5 Safe and cohesive places where people are empowered and have the confidence to play active roles in their communities

In 2020 Maidstone will be an even more desirable place to live. Our diverse communities in Maidstone will be safer and stronger. In addition, our communities will continue to be highly cohesive, with people getting on well with one another. People in Maidstone will also play an active role in their local area through a variety of means such as volunteering and neighbourhood action planning.

6.6 Improved health and wellbeing of people which enables them to live active and independent lives

By 2020 we will have facilitated the creation of active, healthy and independent communities where the gap in health inequalities within the borough have been reduced. In addition, health services within Maidstone will be equally accessible to all members of the community. Health and social care services will be based around enabling independence, providing choice and promoting control. This will be achieved through increased personalisation of social care services and greater patient choice around the health care services they receive.

6.7 Lower levels of poverty and social exclusion in Maidstone by helping more of our socially excluded adults into employment, education and training

In 2020 Maidstone will have lower levels of poverty and social exclusion by tackling the barriers which stop people actively participating in society. This will ensure all our communities have equal access to services and opportunities. The most vulnerable members of our community will receive tailored support services that help them access informative advice, guidance, training, education, employment opportunities and the welfare benefits they are entitled to.

6.8 Mixed and sustainable communities with an increased supply of new homes, improved existing dwellings and a high quality physical environment

We will have helped more people to access affordable high quality housing and reduced the number of people living in temporary accommodation. In addition, the quality of our environment will be improved with cleaner streets and high quality green spaces. Further, the Borough Council and its partners will play an active role in neighbourhood action planning helping to address local issues and improve the quality of life for residents by developing a common understanding of issues within areas of high need, including environmental improvements, but other crossing cutting issues such as health inequalities, low levels of educational attainment, skills and qualifications, high unemployment and low economic activity.

6.9 These outcomes will drive the development of performance measures for the three priorities. The vision of building and maintaining strong communities presides over the priorities and outcomes contained in this strategy and is a common thread throughout the document. Community strength flows from the characteristics and actions of people, equipped and enabled to influence decisions that affect their lives within their neighbourhood, town centre or borough. Meeting the outcomes under each priority of the Maidstone Community Strategy will improve the quality of life for all in the borough, through more people having their needs met appropriately. Our priorities will be reviewed over time, at least every four years, to make sure that we are flexible, build on our success and respond to changing needs.

7. Action Plan – What we will do in order to achieve the stated outcomes

7.1 Priority 1: Troubled Families

What we plan to do	Performance measures
Set up a sub-group to oversee Troubled Families programme for Maidstone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each child in the family has had fewer than 3 fixed exclusions and less than 15% of unauthorised absences in the last 3 school terms • 60% reduction in ASB across the family in the last 6 months • Offending rate by all minors in the family reduce by at least 33% in the last 6 months • One adult in the family has either volunteered for the Work Programme or attached to the ESF provision in the last 6 months • Additional measures to monitor reductions in incidents of domestic abuse and increased referrals to substance misuse support services
Engage service providers, commissioners, professionals to be part of the local operational group	
Meet with partners to discuss the identified families and consequently select an agreed number of families who are in the most need and best position to receive help and services from the agencies' pooled funding and collaboration	
Develop an understanding of the identified families and their needs	
Deliver a training programme for initial family contact organisations to ensure consistency and embed a process for best practice and results	
Agree lead person to make initial contact with families to sign up to the Troubled Families programme	
Agree for each FIP worker to work with 5-10 families at a time, building up to 30 families on a planned rolling basis	
Use a customer journey mapping exercise to inform frontline service delivery and inform further service change	
Undertake a costing analysis with partners on the high contact families to evidence cost reductions	
Explore opportunities for match funding with schools, partners grant generating bodies and non traditional funding sources, including the third sector and local businesses	
Develop opportunities of joint working between Kent Probation, Youth Offending Service and other partners for holistic offender support	
Identify an appropriate partner to act as lead for a defined period to contact and support the families to identify issues that have a negative impact and achieve sustainable long term solutions	

7.2 Priority 2: Tackling Worklessness and Poverty

What we plan to do	Performance measures
Set up a sub-group to oversee the Tackling Worklessness and Poverty priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of young people NEET aged 16-18 reduced • Numbers of young people claiming JSA aged 18-24 reduced • Increased number of work experience placements created • Increased number of apprenticeships created • Additional number of businesses engaging in work experience, apprenticeships, mentoring and jobs for young people
Invite Jobcentre Plus, CXK and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to join the Sub Group	
Focus on unemployed young people, specifically 18-24 year olds	
Tackle the barriers to work especially, transport, adult literacy and childcare identifying initiatives to address the barriers	
Continue to support and expand work experience opportunities amongst local partners	
Encourage businesses to get involved in mentoring, and providing Apprenticeships, work experience and jobs for young people	
Create a Skills Hub Exchange in the Maidstone travel to work area	

7.3 Priority 3: Local Environmental Improvements

What we plan to do	Performance measures
Roll out Neighbourhood Action Planning into the wards of Shepway North and South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of crime offences (burglary – dwellings, robbery offences, theft offences, violence against the person, road traffic collisions) • Percentage waste recycled/composted • Carbon emissions per capita • Number of Housing starts and Housing completions • Homelessness - those in temporary accommodation • Section 106 and CIL agreements - monies received • Additional number of businesses engaging in work experience, apprenticeships, mentoring and jobs for young people
Deliver Operation Civic (multi-agency neighbourhood action operation) into the wards of Shepway North, Shepway South and Park Wood with a focus on Community Policing, Housing and Benefits advice	
Pilot a local environmental improvements programme in Park Wood industrial estate to attract and retain businesses	
Support a Borough wide recycling campaign – targeting residential, street recycling, and business waste	
Undertake a review street furniture provision in urban areas	
Support the implementation of the Green Deal/Retrofit programme in Maidstone	
Improve service delivery at Allington site to support a household waste and recycling centre	
Ensure future S106 and CIL allocations reflect community infrastructure needs	
Design-in recycling for new residential and commercial developments through the	

Planning application stage	
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8. Implementation and monitoring arrangements

- 8.1 The Maidstone Community Strategy has a clear vision for the future of Maidstone borough. We envisage Maidstone as a thriving borough that maximises all its strengths and tackles the root causes of the social, economic and environmental challenges which hold some of the borough and its residents back.
- 8.2 This strategy will drive the changes we need to make within the borough by providing a clear direction of travel for Maidstone. In addition, we have ensured our long-term outcomes are underpinned by clear areas of focus and targets. The work to achieve this will be challenging and will require the public, private, voluntary and community and faith sectors to work together even more closely than before. We are clear that it is only by moving forward together, as one partnership, that we will be able to deliver on these promises.
- 8.3 The Maidstone Community Strategy operates within a performance management system which is structured around effective political and managerial leadership, a clear vision, action centred service planning, regular performance reporting and constructive challenge. To ensure that the Strategy is delivered, the Council will review and monitor the Action Plan through various methods:
- The strategy's action plan has been developed by Maidstone Borough Council and its partners and the delivery of the action plan will be shared by the partners. Maidstone Borough Council will take responsibility for driving this work and for monitoring delivery. We will publish annual performance information - enabling members of the public to see the progress we are making throughout the year and year on year.
 - We will present an annual report and commentary on progress to achieve the vision and deliver the strategy's action plan, using this as an opportunity to challenge partners, to renew commitment to the plan and to update and increase the ambition of the plan when opportunities arise. The report will enable partner organisations, Councillors and members of the public to see the progress we have made and challenge organisations on the work they have undertaken.
 - Clear and effective communication with wider audiences who would be the future partners and stakeholders for delivery will increase the strategy's prospects for success. The strategy is a bold statement of intent and the foundation of a cohesive, partnership approach towards community development in the borough. The action plan links directly to the Borough Council's overarching Communications and Engagement Plan, providing common ground on which to build

partnerships and will help all contributors to broker discussions with new partners.

- 8.4 Publishing this strategy is not an end in itself; rather it is the start of our new journey forward. Maidstone Borough Council is confident that the time we have taken to work with the public, partner organisations, Councillors and central government has ensured that the direction we are taking to make improvements in quality of life is the right one.
- 8.5 To prepare the Maidstone Community Strategy, we talked to local people in many different ways. Local people completed surveys, attended meetings and forums, made comments on a leaflet and submitted their views online. We used information from earlier consultations, where hundreds of people took the chance to tell us what they thought, to make sure that our Maidstone Community Strategy reflects the views of as many people as possible.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 Maidstone Borough Council believes everyone should be treated fairly and with respect. The Partnership recognises that diversity issues will impact on planning and delivery of services and we are committed to ensuring that our work has a positive impact for everyone in the Borough, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief. We welcome the positive contribution that an increasingly diverse population will make to the future prosperity of Maidstone. Discrimination is a reality for some people in the Borough. Because of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and other factors, people are denied opportunities, have difficulty accessing services, and suffer inequalities. In order to deliver our vision of a better Maidstone borough for everyone, we want to create an inclusive and supportive environment that offers equal opportunities for everyone.
- 9.2 Maidstone Borough Council will assess and monitor the relevance and effect of the Maidstone Community Strategy on equalities through its programme of Equality Impact Assessments. Our commitment to equality and diversity includes a commitment to promoting social inclusion for people who are disadvantaged by life circumstances or conditions, including the problems that can be associated with living within areas of deprivation, and with experiencing periods of unemployment, homelessness or other such difficulties.

If you can access the Internet, you can learn more about the Maidstone Community Strategy for Maidstone at www.maidstone.gov.uk If you prefer, you can send your comments, questions or suggestions to our address:

Community Partnerships, Maidstone Borough Council,
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ