

CABINET

19 OCTOBER 2021

COVID-19 RECOVERY

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council

Report from / Author: Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director, Culture and Community

Summary

This report provides the Cabinet with an update on the Council's recovery from the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) global pandemic, following a previous report to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in March 2021. The report was previously considered by that Committee on 19 August 2021.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 Response to an emergency event and the subsequent recovery is a matter for Cabinet. Scrutiny of that response is a matter for the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. This Committee has the additional responsibility of providing guidance and leadership on the development and co-ordination of the scrutiny function for all the O&S committees, including guidance on proprieties for scrutiny activities.

2. Medway's Recovery Plan

2.1 As part of our recovery strategy from Covid-19 we have committed to ensuring that we make the most of this opportunity to 'Build Back Better', by implementing new ways of working and in some instances new operational models as we return to business as usual.

2.2 Our priority, as well as ensuring the safe resumption of all our services is to identify opportunities for Medway to emerge stronger and more resilient from the pandemic with an exciting agenda planned for future years. This report outlines our approach to recovery, that we have started to mainstream into business as usual since July 2021.

2.3 During 2020 and 2021, Covid-19 and the associated Government restrictions led to the suspension of a wide range of Medway Council's services, with a particular impact on discretionary services that are required to generate income through paid for activities.

- 2.4 In March 2021, the government's roadmap for re-opening set out a managed return to business as usual, subject to regular reviews at five-week stages, to ensure that re-opening was progressing in a planned and safe way. The final stage in this process of reopening was delayed on 14 June 2021 from the planned date of 21 June 2021 to 19 July 2021, when all restrictions were removed.
- 2.5 The approach we agreed at Medway Council was to resume our services as quickly as possible, whilst adhering to the government roadmap and ensuring that our facilities were re-opened safely for staff, residents, and visitors. In March 2020, a number of groups were established to focus specifically on recovery; some of these groups continued to meet during our move to response and some will evolve into new formats as we return to business as usual.
- 2.6 Our planned approach to recovery is therefore being rolled out in three phases: Rebound, Rebuild and Reimagine, over 5 plus years. Alongside each of these delivery and implementation phases, we are developing a series of marketing and communications campaigns, to encourage residents and visitors back to our facilities, reassuring them that our services will be delivered in a Covid-19 compliant and safe way.

3. Rebound – Phase One of Recovery 2021-22

3.1. Public Health

- 3.1.1 Medway Council's Public Health Team and other council services are a key stakeholder within the Medway and Swale Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), who are committed to using population health management techniques and strategies to inform the prioritisation and development of its response to Covid-19 as part of the NHS Long Term Plan, and future services transformation across the system.
- 3.1.2 Our partners believe this approach will ensure that we can deliver our ambitions post pandemic to:
- Shift the focus of care from treatment to prevention
 - Listen to local people and our staff to design and develop responsive, effective, equitable evidence-based care pathways
 - Deliver high quality health and care services across pathways from home to specialist care provider (both physical and mental health)
 - Meet constitutional standards, and deliver a sustainable financial position
 - Make the best use of health and care resources (people, money, estate, IT infrastructure etc.)
- 3.1.3 The ICP clinical priorities include:
- Improving mental health
 - Prevention
 - Improving cancer diagnosis and survival

- Children's services
- Reducing unplanned admission
- Redesigning long term condition pathways

3.1.4 Population Health Management (PHM) is an approach that aims to improve physical and mental health outcomes, promote wellbeing and reduce health inequalities across an entire population. PHM enables systems and local teams to understand and look for the best solutions to people's needs – not just medically but also socially – focusing on the wider determinants of people's health.

3.1.5 In addition, the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System has developed a Turning the Tide Board, chaired by James Williams, Director of Public Health for Medway. The Turning the Tide Transformation Oversight Board is to drive implementation of a strategy which will help the system to address the impact Covid-19 is having on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations and workforce and to support the Kent and Medway System in developing a sustainable response. This board has sub-groups focusing on:

- Data and information
- Social marketing, communication and behavioural insight
- Clinical management and risk management
- Health and social care workforce

3.1.6 At the current time, community testing continues at pace across Medway, with a diverse offer in place from Medway Council to ensure that residents can access lateral flow testing twice per week in line with government guidance.

3.1.7 By the end of June 2021, the team had completed 135,000 tests largely delivered at our static testing sites. There is a statutory responsibility for local authorities to provide testing up until at least March 2022.

3.1.8 The Medway plan includes a range of methods including three outreach testing teams who visit different venues and sites to reach the priority groups for testing. The static asymptomatic testing site at the University campus will stay open, as will three collection sites that at the start of July 2021, included a venue in Rochester, Hoo and Rainham, to ensure an equal spread across Medway. Uptake rates and resident feedback will mean these sites are constantly under review as we have more agile distribution options available should we need them.

3.2. Regeneration and Economic Development

3.2.1 An economy and infrastructure recovery cell was established during the first phase of recovery in 2020. This place-based group included representatives from multiple Council departments, and the following external Stakeholder groups:

- Voluntary and Community Sector
- HE (University of Kent and University of Greenwich)
- FE (Mid-Kent College)

- Local business (Medway for Business and town centre fora)
- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Thames Gateway Kent Partnership (now Greater North Kent Partnership)
- BEIS

3.2.2 The cell produced and oversaw the implementation of an impact assessment and action plan, identifying 24 areas of likely and potential impacts from Covid-19 on local economy and infrastructure, and setting out actions to mitigate risks and seize opportunities. Earlier this year, these impact areas were discharged to individual business-as-usual groups and organisations. Following a period of monitoring, the cell formally stood down from its emergency recovery function in June 2021. Many members of the group expressed a desire to continue to meet in an alternative guise, and a new stakeholder group, focusing on strategy and revenue pipeline development is meeting from September 2021 onwards.

3.2.3 Medway Council has also been a member of the Kent & Medway Employment Taskforce, set up in October 2020 to tackle a growing employment crisis. The taskforce has responded by supporting the delivery of Kickstart, supporting longer term planning and business engagement and supporting new business led initiatives.

3.2.4 Throughout the pandemic, the Council has delivered a range of mandatory government packages of support for businesses including more than £72 million during the first lockdown and more than £13 million for the second and third periods of national restrictions. More recently, the Restart Grant Scheme was launched in March 2021 to provide a one-off grant to businesses in the non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure, personal care and accommodation sectors, to support them to reopen safely as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. To date the Council has distributed a total of £8.208 million to 1,121 businesses through this scheme.

3.2.5 Medway Council has agreed that £1 million from the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund will be utilised for a wide range of skills and employment grants programmes. Funding will be provided for employers to take on apprentices, supported interns, people with learning disabilities and care leavers.

3.2.6 Medway Council has supported the provision of the Kent and Medway Growth Hub's Covid-19 Business Recovery Hotline both financially and through promotion. It has administered grants directly to affected businesses and has retained an allocation of ARG funding for business support, to be delivered up to Q1 2022. In Q3 2021 we will see the appointment of a dedicated ARG manager to scope and procure local business support needs. This will involve a full assessment of the current business support landscape to identify gaps in provision and opportunities for increased support. Medway Council continues to actively promote business support opportunities funded by SELEP and the Growth Hub.

- 3.2.7 It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the full impact that the pandemic will have in the longer-term on the changing face of the high street. The impact of social distancing and the implications on limiting the use of the public realm and high streets for events are likely to present significant challenges.
- 3.2.8 Medway Council has continued to develop the plans for our flagship development at Innovation Park Medway (IPM). IPM has received over £10m in SELEP, GBF & MHCLG funding to assist in the delivery of the scheme. This included additional funding sought in late 2020 which will help deliver an impressive public realm and collaboration space. The design has been adapted and improved, picking up on the impacts of Covid-19 and incorporating the physical impacts within the design, for example, more outdoor collaborative working spaces.
- 3.2.9 Medway Development Company Ltd. (MDC) continues to progress its early phase sites, which forms a key part of the Council's recovery and regeneration strategy. The first major projects that will be delivered will be Garrison Point and Chatham Waterfront, which will create new residential communities within Chatham and help support the high street and local economy. These projects are in construction and will also see the creation and enhancement of public realm areas that will widen the appeal of choosing to live and work within Chatham.
- 3.2.10 Within Gillingham, MDC has completed its first phase scheme where the Britton Farm former supermarket has been converted into accommodation for the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust (KMPT). KMPT are now operational and further improvements are being implemented, following a recent approval of the Getting Building Fund of £1.9 million. This will lead to additional enhancements to the Britton Farm site where the rear storage areas of the former store will be converted to an Adult Education provision. There will also be a significant intervention in the public realm area, with removal of the roof on the mall area and both of these projects are currently in progress.
- 3.2.11 Forty-four affordable residential apartments will also be built on the former loading bay area of the Britton Farm supermarket site. This prominent development forms part of a concerted investment in Gillingham, that will enhance this strategic gateway site and create residential homes close to the high street. The demolition phase of this scheme has completed, and construction works are commencing.
- 3.2.12 Following a successful Future High Streets Fund bid, MDC is also progressing projects that will lead to public realm enhancements to the Paddock area that is adjacent to Chatham Bus Station, but also improvements to the former Bus Station, Taxi Rank and adjacent Pentagon shopping entrance areas. These schemes are within their design development stage and will create a welcoming environment for those visiting Chatham.

Re-opening the High Streets

3.2.13 The "Reopening the High Street" cell was re-formed in March 2021. The purpose of the cell was to co-ordinate the response and recovery actions across different council departments and external stakeholders, to facilitate the safe reopening of high streets in Medway throughout the phased lifting of lockdown restrictions.

3.2.14 Stakeholders included:

- Trading Standards and Environmental Health
- Kent Police
- Town centre managers
- Events team (managing "The Greeters")
- Licensing
- Waste services
- Environmental enforcement
- Customer and Business support
- Comms and Digital
- Parking services
- Emergency planning

3.2.15 The cell was instrumental in managing the continued excellent work of the Council's Greeters, who helped to ensure the high streets were reopened safely in spring 2021.

3.2.16 The cell helped to horizon scan, plan for potential issues, and identify practical solutions. For example, the cell identified that the Council had inadequate powers to deal with businesses obstructing the pavement with tables and chairs. As a result, work is now progressing on introducing a licensing scheme that will ensure that businesses can place items on to the highway, but without endangering the public.

3.2.17 Cell members were also able to visit the high streets to identify issues on the ground and offer advice to all businesses to ensure the safety of their staff and their customers. During 2020/21, cell members carried out over 14,600 engagement visits to commercial premises in Medway. They issued 29 formal prohibition notices and agreed to the voluntary closure of a further 322 commercial premises that were found to be non-compliant. This helped to build public confidence that returning to the high streets was safe. The cell also helped to manage a multi-agency response to any realised issues. The cell continues to meet on a weekly basis, and it is anticipated that the links forged between services will continue when the cell is disbanded.

3.2.18 The Town Centre Management Team (TCM) continues to lead and manage the Reopening High Streets Safely Programme, and associated budget in response to Covid-19. This has included the delivery of various key projects within the programme, including Medway Greeters, The Rainbow Effect (Public Art Safety), Town Centre Business Directory, planters and signage for

social distancing, sanitiser stations, shop local, shop safely campaign and footfall monitoring.

3.2.19 A bid has recently been submitted to the Welcome Back Fund for further funding to support the following interventions:

- Welcome Back campaign and messaging to support the local economy, encourage local visiting to attractions/shops/hospitality.
- Refreshing guidance packs to businesses on operating safely and making temporary adjustments to premises as Covid-19 journey unfolds.
- Wrapping of empty shops and Medway branding with themes of safely reopening and recovery, climate change and business support. Engage local artists to support branding for shopping wrapping.
- Specialist deep street clean for high streets.
- Replacing all current town centre signage with gentle reminders to people to take care and stay safe and remember key messages as we journey out of lockdown and on the Road to Recovery.

Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy Review

3.2.20 During the latter part of 2021, a review of Medway 2035 will be undertaken in consultation with partners. This is Medway's regeneration and economic development strategy and will reflect a number of catalytic changes since Medway 2035 was approved by Cabinet in December 2018, including the award of HIF funding, the commitment to child-friendly city status, the declaration of a climate change emergency, the decision to bid for City of Culture 2025, and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2.21 In Q3 of 2021 we will also see the start of the Skills & Employment Plan refresh, taking the impact of Covid-19 into consideration, along with key policy changes and the Workforce Skills Evidence base 2021. The Medway Adult Education Business Plan will be signed off and under delivery, and the new academic year will see the start of new courses and the delivery of our 2021/2022 curriculum.

3.3. Children's Services

Child-Friendly Medway

3.3.1 During 2020/21, alongside managing the Covid-19 pandemic, we started our journey towards becoming 'Child Friendly Medway', having concluded our first consultation (a survey) with children and young people to find out what it feels like to be a young person living in Medway, their needs and wants, opportunities and aspirations. As well as to understand how children and young people would like to be involved in shaping the future of Medway and the Child-Friendly Medway plan.

3.3.2 We have now started our second phase of the Child Friendly Medway consultation. Following up on the insights from the survey responses from

children and young people on growing up in Medway and their aspirations; to determine the key areas of interest and better understand their worries and concerns for the future. We will be facilitating these discussions through focus groups led by the research agency Tonic and the Youth Service.

- 3.3.3 In July 2021, we started our first element of the 'seeing is believing' programme for Child-Friendly Medway, providing opportunities for children and young people. We are delivering eight weeks of drop-in football in six parks across Medway for young people 5-16 years old, offering free positive, healthy activities in their local community, and starting to build momentum for this new initiative, with buy-in from the young people, families and carers, as well as the wider community.
- 3.3.4 Throughout autumn 2021 we will use this insight to work with young people to develop our vision, plans and marketing. We will be working with young people and professionals through a City Halls (public meetings) approach and focus groups to determine the values, mission, key priorities, and action plan for Child-Friendly Medway. Providing a meaningful way for young people to be involved in shaping the future of Medway and having a say in decisions, service design and spaces that shape their lives.

Children's Social Care (incl. Improvement Programme)

- 3.3.5 In 2020, the Children's Social Care Recovery Cell was convened which included key leads across Children's Social Care, Education and Children's Commissioning. Weekly meetings provided oversight and coordination to planning the recovery, ensuring intelligence and information was shared. A phased approach to recovery in these sectors has been taken at Medway, in line with the dates set out in the government roadmap for easing lockdown.
- 3.3.6 Work has continued with families and vulnerable children including face-to-face contact with the most vulnerable, specifically resuming for children subject to child protection plans. Detailed and comprehensive operating procedures have been revised to take account of the Recovery phase and provide staff with clarity on dealing with children and families, how to maintain contact with families, working from home and managing all aspects of child protection planning and processes. These have been communicated to other safeguarding partners. All children and families have been risk assessed and safety plans are in place which determine the level and type of contact required.
- 3.3.7 The service returned to business as usual from the 19 July when social distancing and restrictions were lifted. Operational procedures were revised to reflect this, whilst priority risk assessments (PRA) and safety plans will be reactivated if the Covid-19 situation prevents visiting.
- 3.3.8 Those parts of the service who have a reliance on buildings for the delivery of services have been adapted to be compliant with social distancing and other health and safety measures, allowing them to resume in a phased way, and have now resumed on a face-to-face basis e.g. the resumption of group work

in Early Help hubs, Youth Services venues and Family Contact at the Sunlight Centre.

- 3.3.9 The wellbeing and resilience of the workforce has been a key focus throughout the pandemic. Vaccinations continue to be actively promoted with good uptake of around 80% of workers. Staff are regularly reminded to continue with asymptomatic testing at least twice a week, even if they have had the vaccine. Testing will help to keep our infection rate low.
- 3.3.10 The recovery plan has been based on 'blended' working arrangements for each element of the service that will ensure the right balance of face-to-face direct work with children and families, home working, office, and using virtual/remote delivery or creative ways of working where benefits are clear, for example, virtual meetings have positively impacted attendance by key professionals.
- 3.3.11 This will include a capability for 'hybrid' meetings with a mixture of face to face and virtual attendees, for example, Child Protection Conferences, which involve families and key professionals. For some buildings this will have a financial cost related to minor alterations and some investment in technology (large screens and communications equipment). The hybrid model is currently being piloted by IT Services and expected to be in place across the service during autumn 2021.
- 3.3.12 Despite the challenge of the pandemic, the Improvement Programme has continued unabated. The team has continued to work at pace to make significant improvements within the service and made substantial targeted investment to drive the developments. In May 2021, Medway welcomed a team from Ofsted on a virtual assurance visit to review how well children have been safeguarded during Covid-19 restrictions. The resulting Ofsted report is encouraging, highlighting many areas of progress in embedding change across the service. It also sets out some areas of focus which will be pursued as part of our improvement plan. The Service expects further monitoring visits as part of the ILACS framework throughout 2021-22.

3.4. Education

- 3.4.1 In 2020, the Education Recovery group was convened; membership of the group included LA officers together with a range of professionals from across all education phases. Weekly meetings brought together education leaders to consider and begin to plan for the recovery phase. This group was solutions focused and represented education colleagues across all phases, contexts and the council in order to:
- Share intelligence, gather information and discuss the response to key challenges and directives from the Secretary of State
 - Work in partnership with a representative from the DfE and RSC (Regional Schools Commissioner).
 - Recognise and share best practice in the current context
 - Align and co-ordinate provision across all education settings and the council

- Ensure effective communication from this group into the Covid-19: *HT Ref group* and colleagues across all education settings

3.4.2 From the outset, this group agreed that they would plan beyond the immediate and move towards the recovery phase, addressing identified issues to facilitate effective provision. Immediate issues for consideration were identified as follows:

- Transition back into education settings
- Transition between phases within and outside of immediate education settings
- Pupil assessment / grading systems, reporting and moderation arrangements
- Pupils with an EHCP/SEND/vulnerable/disadvantaged pupils
- The Medway Test
- University and college applications for September 2021
- Provision for children and young people during a school holiday

3.4.3 This group has continued through to the present day to ensure that the full return to school since March 2021 has been coordinated, informed and appropriate to the relevant government legislative directives.

3.4.4 The group is firmly sighted on planning ahead, anticipating emerging issues and providing guidance to stakeholders. Education provision throughout Medway has been fully reopened since March 2021. Some schools have had to close bubbles, or in two cases the whole school, for a period of time when positive cases occurred, but all services, including home learning, are available for schools and pupils.

3.4.5 SEND pupils have been transported via the councils SEND transport contracts and wherever possible pupils have been transported in their bubbles to minimise cross infection. For mainstream pupils, public bus services have continued, and duplicate and additional services have been provided to enable social distancing on school buses, which has been funded via a government grant. This continued to the end of term in mid-July 2021.

3.4.6 School catering has been fully available since March 2021, with the governments Covid-19 support grant funding vouchers for Free School Meal eligible pupils during the school holidays.

3.4.7 Schools fully reopened again after the school summer holidays in September 2021 when the academic year began. All services are available, and continued support from the Local Authorities is in place in line with central government directives.

3.4.8 Regular communications with head teachers through meetings and written briefings will continue to ensure all schools are aware of, and can react to, any changes and initiatives that arise.

3.5. Adult Social Care and Partnership Commissioning

- 3.5.1 The pandemic caused significant pressure in Adult Social Care, across the division. The introduction of virtual assessments was introduced with only complex situations causing visits to take place. A hybrid model will continue this year, although the need to visit people to fully understand an individual's needs has been recognised.
- 3.5.2 The Adult Partnership Commissioning service established direct communication with all Medway social care providers through daily email bulletins and an interactive Care Portal which offers providers easy access to national guidance and local health and social care information, advice on accessing PPE, advice on workforce issues, training, and details of financial support and Covid-19 recovery.
- 3.5.3 The Commissioning partnership have established a Medway and Swale ICP Care Home Group which enables partners to identify those care homes requiring additional support which includes medicine management, safeguarding, end of life care, PPE, IPC, visiting and testing. Care Providers are regularly reminded how to access health and wellbeing support services that are offered by Public Health and KMCCG.
- 3.5.4 Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the pressure on the Medway Foundation Trust has continued, with a significant increase in the number of people attending the hospital being seen. This has an impact on the Integrated Discharge Team, who are working tirelessly to ensure people are discharged to an appropriate residential/nursing home to support hospital flow.
- 3.5.6 There has been a marked increase in the amount of debt owed to Adult Social Care through the pandemic. In depth analysis is underway to identify the reasons for the increase and a debt recovery action plan will be put in place to support the reduction in debt owed. Client Financial Affairs have reinstated both client visits and Protection of Property Visits and are now working in a business-as-usual position.
- 3.5.7 Shared Lives, Birling Avenue respite provision and Flight Supported Living, the Council's in-house services are all providing services. Regular testing continues and all interactions and interventions are Covid-19 safe. Our Mental Health outreach and day services are both providing support as normal, in accordance with Covid-19 safe practice and regular testing continues.
- 3.5.8 The Care Quality Commission suspended assurance visits to registered providers during the pandemic and our Quality Assurance (QA) visits were suspended in line with government guidance related to visiting care providers. QA visits have recently been reinstated and we are working collaboratively with the CQC to support providers. The team are also supporting day services to ensure providers can open at a maximum capacity in a safe environment.

3.6. Transport

- 3.6.1 During the second phase of the recovery, Government expects local authorities to demonstrate its commitment to the 'bus back better' aspirations set out in the National Bus Strategy. Local Authorities are required to set up an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or a "Franchising arrangement" with operators, working together to improve local bus services. By the end of October 2021, Government expects all LTAs to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This must set out how LTAs will use their EP to deliver an ambitious vision for bus travel, meeting the overarching goal of the National Bus Strategy to grow back patronage after the pandemic and then to increase it and raise the mode share of the bus.
- 3.6.2 It is anticipated that Government will make available significant grant funding as part of its £3 billion commitment to improving bus services across the country. Through its Bus Service Improvement Plan, the Council will identify suitable areas for investment, either in bus services themselves, or to supporting infrastructure such as interchanges, bus stops and bus priority measures. This work will be undertaken through the Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators.

3.7. Digital, CABS and Communications

- 3.7.1 The Digital, CABS and Comms teams formed a 'customer ready' cell to support the council's recovery. Representatives joined the 're-opening of services' cell and the 're-opening of highstreets' cell to ensure the latest information was being made available to customers, (online, on the phones and face-to-face, and through the various outbound communication channels) in a timely way, as the government's roadmap progressed. Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021, Medway.gov.uk had nearly 19.9 million page views compared with 14 million page views in the same period the year before.
- 3.7.2 As face-to-face contact had reduced during the pandemic due to government restrictions. The Digital team built many new online services to support residents and colleagues to stay connected. The team built more than 10 new online services, including Book a tip visit, apply for parking vouchers and apply for a business grant.
- 3.7.3 More recently, work continued on building new online services and website content to support residents and business owners as the country reopens, including the latest business grant applications and a new Rochester Corn Exchange website to promote the venue's reopening.
- 3.7.4 The CABS telephony service has operated as normal (with slightly modified opening hours) throughout the pandemic, with no service disruption, although some processes and the information available to customers has been modified to reflect the changes in other council services. As restrictions eased, a good deal of work was undertaken through the Customer Ready cell, working with recovery cells, to ensure current service information was

reflected in the 'scripting' and FAQs employed by CABS customer-facing officers (and was consistent with web pages).

- 3.7.5 As services have reopened or extended scope, and as restrictions eased, CABS responded to mirror these changes. Blue Badge face-to-face expert assessments resumed, as did face-to-face customer complaint reviews and investigations, although the children's social care complaints panels are now successfully being conducted using MS Teams. Macmillan welfare benefits advice continues through the current stage as a telephone service, but face-to-face appointments (at Maidstone Hospital or through home visits) will restore when appropriate. Operating telephone interpreting throughout the pandemic, CIS remains responsive to demand, operating within the prevailing Covid-19 regulations.
- 3.7.6 Rainham Contact Point, operated by CABS, had closed in line with Covid-19 retail restrictions, and this reopened, with 'normal' Monday to Saturday hours, as of 12 April 2021. Kingsley House (Revenues and Benefits, and Housing face-to-face office) had, throughout the pandemic, maintained service through an appointment system, and this remains in place through 'rebound' and beyond, as an effective operational model.
- 3.7.7 Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic the communications and marketing team have supported all services across the Council. In late 2020, a shop local campaign was launched encouraging residents to visit their local high streets. During this campaign, we found ourselves in another lockdown so we changed messaging where we could to, shop online but still keep it local. This messaging still runs throughout our marketing.
- 3.7.8 We continue to support our Public Health team and the vital work that is being carried out. We have spoken about the importance of regular testing, issued comms on a whole host of Covid-19 messaging and updates, and launched campaigns that have been heavily impacted by Covid-19, such as domestic abuse, mental health, smoking, eating healthy, exercising regularly etc. Internally, we have and continue to communicate any changes that have an impact on employees. We have supported and encouraged employees to fill out the staff survey, and we issue regular updates and regular messages from the Leader.

3.8. Culture, Libraries, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage

- 3.8.1 In March 2021, sports centre facilities re-opened for schools, colleges and universities, as well as facilities for elite athletes. Sports centre staff produced a range of online activity prior to the phased reopening of sports centres from the middle of April 2021. To enable this to happen, staff from the sport, leisure, tourism and heritage services ended their operational Covid-19 test centre roles to enable facilities to begin reopening. The phased reopening was supported through the recovery process by the introduction of a bronze recovery cell responsible for liaising with Silver/Gold/Leader on reopening of customer-facing Council services and facilities.

- 3.8.2 We also launched a marketing campaign to get people back to our leisure centres. We focussed on regular gym goers and those that still remained physically active at home whilst our centres were closed. We ran with messaging such as 'no more splashing about in the bath.' We also launched outdoor classes and pushed these along with joining as a Premier Member, as this meant priority booking. We then developed another campaign aimed at women - 'we've got the classes; you bring the me time.' The idea was to focus on escaping lockdown and finally having some time to yourself. This campaign ran again in September 2021, a time when women are most likely to join the gym.
- 3.8.3 From April 2021, sports centres were able to partially open facilities to the public, including gyms and swimming pools. Fitness classes were arranged outdoors.
- 3.8.4 Cafes were able to resume serving people sitting at outside tables. Riverside and Capstone country parks reopened their education facilities and their cafes with outdoor seating. At the same time, weddings and civil ceremonies recommenced with up to 15 people attending. It was also possible to have a maximum of 30 people at a funeral or an event to remember someone. The Brook Theatre box office re-opened, but no public performances were able to take place until September 2021.
- 3.8.5 In May 2021, heritage attractions began to operate with Rochester Castle, the Guildhall Museum and the Visitor Information Centre reopening. Sports centre activities were able to increase with indoor fitness classes, indoor racket sports and adult clubs returning indoors. Free swimming returned and the Strand swimming pool reopened.
- 3.8.6 Although our usual events programme was cancelled, we have continued to promote what is happening across Medway and the activities people can still enjoy, such as the Rainbow Effect, Electric Medway, The Rapture Gaming Festival, Festival at the Fort, Together, Medway Pride, Gillingham POW! Welcome to Cloisterham, Festival of Chatham Reach and Medway Fun Palace. We've kept people engaged on social media by having throwbacks of Dickens Festival, Armed Forces Day and the Rochester Art Gallery.
- 3.8.7 To support this, we have been working with the marketing and communications team to develop a tourism campaign aimed at local residents, visiting friends and family and people who live just outside of the area. We want people to not only re-discover Medway but also explore the things they may not know existed. The #WhoKnew campaign aims to highlight all of the unusual attractions and activities there are in Medway. WhoKnew Medway had the largest toboggan run in the country, WhoKnew - champing. WhoKnew about the beautiful gardens at Restoration House.
- 3.8.8 The idea of the campaign is not only to showcase what's on offer, but for people to share their #WhoKnew moments on our digital channels so we create user generated content, which always receives a higher reach and level of engagement. This campaign is ongoing.

3.8.9 There is less certainty about what is going to be possible in the autumn and winter of 2021. Our plan at the current time is to continue delivering the services that have re-opened throughout 2021, excluding those only open during the summer.

3.8.10 We are planning a programme of events for the autumn period, including Black History month, Fireworks night, Dickensian Christmas, Remembrance Parades and the Pantomime at Christmas. This programme is being kept under review and we may need to adapt our plans closer to the time. Professional theatre productions at The Brook and Central Theatres, commenced from September 2021.

3.9. Housing

3.9.1 During the initial recovery phase, the housing service returned to a period of business as usual. A significant number of rough sleepers remained in accommodation that had been scaled up at the beginning of the pandemic under the “everyone in” instruction. Working with MHCLG the need for move on accommodation was established, with bids for various streams of funding being developed for the “Next Steps Accommodation Programme” and year four of the “Rough Sleepers Initiative”. Work continued to move rough sleepers on to alternative, longer term accommodation options, including setting up a shared accommodation property with a voluntary sector provider to provide move on accommodation for nine people.

3.9.2 General access to support for housing issues has remained in place throughout the pandemic with some alternative processes in place. Those approaching the Council for support recovered to above expected annual levels at the end of the 2020/21 year. Despite this, levels of eviction from the privately rented sector were lower, due to the cessation from eviction. Overall levels and caseloads continue to be monitored to determine the level of back log. The service has proactively engaged with Private and Social Landlords in order to assist any tenants that may be at risk of homelessness.

3.10 Corporate Services

3.10.1 The message given to us by the government as we start to lift restrictions has been clear and consistent – if staff can work from home they should continue to do so.

3.10.2 As all restrictions have been lifted, plans are underway to ensure a safe return to work for staff, which is likely to result in a hybrid of office and home-based working. This has provided the Council with an opportunity to consolidate the office space at Gun Wharf and lease out specific areas.

3.10.3 The Council has now agreed to lease some parts of Level 2 in Gun Wharf to a third party. This has presented a challenge in terms of relocating the services currently occupying these areas – but there is also an opportunity to relocate teams to promote innovation and collaboration, break down silos and reflect changes in service areas.

3.10.4 The introduction of “blanket policies” were considered e.g. no defined spaces for service areas, bookable hot desks, and enforcing remote working. However, although blanket policies can sound fair “on paper”, we recognise that this is one of those situations where, trying to treat everyone equally may actually lead to less equality because:

- Service requirements differ regarding agile/hybrid working
- All staff have different personal circumstances
- Not everyone has a suitable space at home to work

3.10.5 The following principles are therefore being adopted:

- Services given allocated areas within Gun Wharf to facilitate identification of further space reductions
- Service Managers able to plan the staff presence required to best suit service delivery – likely to differ between services
- Services located to promote innovation and collaboration between teams
- Allow service managers to find the best options for their staff to take into account personal circumstances, which should be discussed with teams/individuals, such as:
 - fixed desks
 - rotating staff
 - permanent remote staff
- A number of “Hot Desks” will still be available throughout Gun Wharf for anyone to use e.g. for services that do not have a permanent location in the building.

3.10.6 To facilitate hybrid working, the use of other Council facilities will be promoted, including:

- Community hubs
- Libraries
- Sport centres
- Office space
- One public estate.

3.10.7 A guide will be produced for staff detailing how they can use other buildings and what equipment is available.

3.11 Collaboration Spaces

3.11.1 A range of different options for collaboration spaces and meeting rooms will be trialled to provide better spaces for team meetings, collaboration exercises, and hybrid meetings with a mix of physical and digital presence. This will enable us to determine what methods staff prefer to use before rolling out the solutions.

3.11.2 Options to improve the soundproofing and acoustics of Gun Wharf will also be considered to facilitate confidential meetings within meeting rooms and reduce background “office noise” when staff are on TEAMS calls.

3.12 Human Resources – Flexible Policy changes for flexible working

3.12.1 Medway Council is developing a range of flexible working practices to enable more effective working in a variety of ways from a variety of work settings.

The Council has, for several years, operated working from home on a limited basis to accommodate specific individual or service needs, we now plan to expand this offer to more colleagues.

3.12.2 The benefits we have seen over the last eighteen months have been significant for both staff and the organisation. The benefits for staff have included, increased interaction with managers, reduced commuting time, reduced stress and a better work-life balance which improves morale, health, well-being and ultimately effectiveness. The benefits for the organisation have included, improved morale and an outcome-focused approach that suggests improved productivity and service levels.

3.12.3 Within our workforce we have seen remarkable behaviours, resilience, adaptability, and skills that we would not have witnessed had we continued operating in the usual way, for example embracing technology. The continuation of such practices will see customer satisfaction improve, absenteeism and attrition go down and the wider organisational culture changing to one in which staff are exhibiting positive behaviours, resulting in a new and more engaged culture. This also enables us to attract the right staff but most significantly of all, agile working can lead directly to improved delivery of our organisation's long-term strategy, goals and vision.

3.12.4 Provided that it fits in with the needs of the service, flexible working at Medway Council is intended to provide flexibility about:

- hours and working patterns
- working from the office or at home
- using a range of fixed and flexible desks, work settings and buildings

3.12.5 These flexible working practices are detailed in our draft Working Flexible HR Policy, and will be circulated for further consultation with colleagues, Trade Union and Employment Matters committee over the coming months.

3.12.6 The HR Team carried out a second survey in April 2021, to understand how people are finding their current working arrangements and to gain insights into the views of staff regarding future ways of working for the organisation.

3.12.7 Recent surveys revealed 90% satisfaction with the flexible working arrangements being made by the council for staff, 92% reported regular, effective communication with managers, 83% reporting their managers were aware of their well-being and mental health and 88% satisfied with information on the council and Covid-19 they were receiving.

3.12.8 HR are currently reviewing policies to support hybrid working and ICT are reviewing the equipment required to support staff working remotely, in the office, or from home.

3.12.9 Workforce planning will also remain a crucial part of preparing our business for future success. We need to continue work to identify demand for new talent and ensure we can continue to develop and acquire the skills we need as the future changes. The first stage will be to analyse our current workforce, identifying skills to help determine how successfully we are coping with the current level of business demand.

3.12.10 Alongside this, it is important to understand the demographics of the workforce, for example how many employees are close to retirement age. This will be followed by a demand analysis and a gap analysis to help set out the solution to ensure we are prepared with a workforce to manage the future scope of work.

4. Rebuild – Phase Two of Recovery 2022-2023

4.1. This will be a year of consolidation and also a pivotal year in terms of influencing our direction of travel.

4.2. Public Health

4.2.1 The new year represents an opportunity to promote healthy lifestyles and the Public Health team are preparing a headline healthy weight campaign that aims to motivate and inspire a large percentage of the population to improve their diet, move more and work towards and maintain a healthy weight. This programme will be in addition to our other healthy lifestyle promotions that include the business-as-usual health messaging such as stop smoking, alcohol reduction and attending an NHS Health Check (amongst others).

4.3. Regeneration and Economic Development

4.3.1 The new iteration of Medway 2035 will be published in 2022. This will continue to be a central strategy for Medway, bringing together a wide range of strategic approaches within Medway Council and from among its partners. It will continue to be a bold and ambitious depiction of the future Medway, whilst reflecting the challenges presented by economic recovery.

4.3.2 This is also a year when a number of major development projects will be underway and these are highlighted in detail in the *Reimagine* phase from 2024 onwards, as new facilities, public realm improvements and housing developments start to become available for our communities across Medway. The Learning Skills & Employment Hub will also be fully operational. We will use this as a renewed opportunity for a drive to raise awareness of Medway as a desirable place to live and learn.

4.3.3 Communications will remain a key feature of our Future Hoo work, as we ensure that local residents understand the benefits this important infrastructure programme will offer them as Medway residents; as well as looking outwards at a later stage to encourage people from outside Medway to consider the opportunities that Hoo offers as a great place to live, work, learn and visit.

4.4. Children's Services

Child-Friendly Medway

4.4.1 At this stage we expect to have returned to business as usual in terms of our day-to-day provision of care. We will continue to 'invest' in children and young people across Medway, ensuring that they have access to the best social care and educational opportunities available.

Children's Social Care (incl. Improvement Programme)

4.4.2 Our 'blended' working arrangements are expected to be fully operational and embedded through 2022 and beyond, in line with the Council's wider HR and organisational development strategy.

4.4.3 Our journey out of intervention to providing good high-quality services will continue at pace in line with clear improvement plans. The timing of any future ILACS inspection is unknown. We will embed the improvements already made and, in lieu of the inspection, respond to any areas of focus highlighted in Ofsted monitoring visits.

4.5. Education

4.5.1 Schools will continue to operate through 2022 and beyond as usual, with full support from the LA in line with government directives. Officers will maintain the excellent relationships and partnerships with schools and academies, to support schools in emerging from the restrictions of Covid-19 in a positive way.

4.6. Adult Social Care and Partnership Commissioning

4.6.1 Adult Social Care will continue to operate as usual in 2022 and beyond, although the Health and Social Care integration agenda is currently being progressed and we expect to know more about how this will impact our services in the next six months. More information will be known about the proposed CQC Adult Social Care reviews in 2022, and we will have a better understanding of the requirements thereafter.

4.6.2 It is recognised nationally that the pandemic has had an impact on people's mental health. The impact is already starting to emerge with the number of Mental Health Act Assessments (MHAA) increasing and becoming more complex. The Mental Health Act (MHA) places on local authorities the duty to provide Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHP) services. The council is, therefore, responsible for ensuring that enough AMHPs are available to carry out their roles under the MHA, including assessing patients to decide whether an application for detention should be made. They should have arrangements in place to provide a 24-hour service that can respond to patients' needs in a timely way.

- 4.6.3 If the number of MHAA's continue to increase, this will have financial implications for the authority, as there will be a need to increase the number of AMHPs. Furthermore, due to the complex needs of people with mental ill-health, we are seeing an increase in the level of care needed to support people. Should the numbers of people with mental ill-health continue to increase as it is being suggested they will, this will cause additional pressures in future years for Adult Social Care from both a resource and financial perspective.
- 4.6.4 At this stage, we do not know what impact Long Covid will have on our population, and this will need to be monitored carefully in the coming years.

4.7. Digital, CABs and Communications

- 4.7.1 The marketing and communications team will continue supporting all services across the council. We will work closely on key priorities such as tourism promotion and our high street offer, Public Health services, income generation services, Child friendly City, UK City of Culture Bid, City Status and Climate Change.
- 4.7.2 Following the huge rise in website visitor numbers during the pandemic, the Digital team will continue to ensure the council's website Medway.gov.uk, remains accurate and legal. And continue to work with colleagues to identify new ways of delivering their services, efficiently, online and through other digital solutions.
- 4.7.3 The team is also involved in discussions with other colleagues and partners, on how best to support customers who do not readily go online to access council services.
- 4.7.4 All services will continue to work with Digital colleagues to support the development of online options for customers, to reduce traditional telephone calls wherever possible, but without disadvantaging customers. As well as being part of the authority's digital journey, this is essential to ensure telephone demand reduces in line with diminished resources.
- 4.7.5 For CABS administration services and directly owned workstreams:
- Community Interpreting Service (CIS) will continue to maintain relationships with key customers and explore new revenues and new ways of working
 - Macmillan Welfare Benefits has been the subject of an unprecedented 3 year funding renewal, reflecting the charity's confidence in the service. This presents the opportunity to develop elements of the service such as face to face appointments at Kent Oncology Centre and the acquisition of case management software.
- 4.7.6 The Kingsley House operation will continue to be reviewed, and refined where necessary, and longer-term options considered in line with our evolving accommodation approach.

4.8. Culture, Libraries, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage

- 4.8.1 We will revisit our approach to tourism and place promotion by shifting our focus in 2022 to external visitors to Medway; we will modernise our tourism offer by improving our digital presence, both physically through screens and totems and virtually through www.visitmedway.org with the potential to develop a new Visit Medway app. We will also start to roll out our project to modernise our signage across Medway this year, starting with the 52 entry and exit signs.
- 4.8.2 This is the year when we expect a decision regarding our UK City of Culture bid, which is likely to be in May 2022. We are also bidding for City Status with a decision expected in June 2022. Throughout the year we will ensure that our engagement with these two competitions helps to raise the profile of Medway regionally, nationally and internationally, including with businesses, politicians and other opinion formers.
- 4.8.3 In autumn 2022 we will deliver the Medway Design and Regeneration Awards. This is a large-scale event for key stakeholders and will celebrate the design and regeneration achievements across Medway to date, along with a forward look to future opportunities for the area.
- 4.8.4 We are also planning an anniversary campaign in 2023 to celebrate Medway Council's 25th birthday, building on the success of the 20th anniversary work. This will be an opportunity to reflect on the successes we have achieved in the last 25 years, whilst also promoting a positive vision for the area for the next 25 years, with a focus on the Local Plan proposals and the development of the Hoo Peninsula.

4.9. Housing

- 4.9.1 In this phase, the Housing Service will have largely returned to business as usual. Work will continue to mobilise all aspects of initiatives that have received funding from MHCLG, a small number of Rough Sleepers are likely to remain accommodated by the Housing Service whilst longer term housing solutions are sourced, to date very few rough sleepers have needed to be asked to leave accommodation with the majority moving on positively to alternative options.

4.10. Corporate Services

- 4.10.1 The Business Change Team will be working closely with the Property and Valuation and Asset Management teams on a property rationalisation project. The Council has around 140 operational buildings, ranging from large properties such as Gun Wharf and Sports Centres to smaller properties such as toilet blocks and sports pavilions.
- 4.10.2 There are currently just under 30 properties that are "leasehold", so there is an opportunity to rationalise the number of buildings to achieve revenue savings on paying rent, NNDR and insurances.

4.10.3 Six properties have been identified as part of this review, which have lease end dates within the next 4 years, so options for each of these will be considered between now and 2024.

4.11. Human Resources

4.11.1 Medway Council will build on the work that was started during lockdown and developed into new policies as we returned to the office. We will establish modern and efficient ways of working for employees. This will include reducing accommodation and travel costs, and tailoring working hours to better support the needs of the service, its employees and customers.

5. Reimagine – Phase Three of Recovery 2024 – onwards

5.1 2024 will be the start of the Reimagine phase of recovery for Medway, as regeneration programmes are completed, and Medway residents will have access to a suite of new facilities.

5.2 Public Health

5.2.1 A key priority for the Public Health team and wider health stakeholders during the 'reimagine' phase will be a continued focus on tackling long-term health inequalities. It is likely that Covid-19 will follow the pattern seen in other long-term health conditions, with specific population groups experiencing the worst health outcomes. By prioritising prevention, using targeted interventions and focusing on the wider determinants of health, the system can reduce some of these health inequalities, which will require a number of years to reverse.

5.2.2 Priority will also be given to the largest population health problems according to our needs assessment data which includes healthy weight and mental health.

5.3 Regeneration and Economic Development

5.3.1 At the start of the 'reimagine' phase, in 2024, the Future High Streets Fund capital programme will be complete, including a number of public realm improvements for Chatham. We will fully re-open the high street, as well as offering a number of new and exciting facilities for local residents and businesses at the Pentagon, the Brook Theatre and Mountbatten House.

5.3.2 The Heritage Creative Quarter from Sun Pier to Star Hill will also be complete in 2024. Through a programme of capital works, a new area of the town will be established with a growing multi-cultural community, animating the unique heritage buildings and untold story of Chatham Intra, establishing it as a destination in its own right.

5.3.3 Should our Levelling-Up Funds bid be successful, these will also be fully delivered by Q1 2024, adding exciting new facilities to Medway's public realm and commercial offering.

- 5.3.4 In 2025, the Hoo Peninsula development will be underway. A new community will be establishing itself as the sixth Medway town and part of an exciting new rural development, offering state of the art transport and leisure provision, as well as access to beautiful green spaces and the river.
- 5.3.5 In 2024, Innovation Park Medway (IPM) is expected to start delivering B1 & B2 uses in the form of a new business/science park. Upon its completion in 2025/6 it is expected that a total of 100,000 square meters of space will be delivered, along with new public realm, providing communal exterior workspace and entertainment space. This is a flagship development for Medway and will contribute to the 'reimagine' phase of recovery. Work will commence in August 2021 to deliver the infrastructure for both the northern and southern sites. These works will take approx. 12 months to complete and then the delivery of the buildings will commence.
- 5.3.6 By 2024, MDC will have completed its Garrison Point and Chatham Waterfront projects, that will reinvigorate the riverside areas by delivering new high quality residential apartments, enhanced public realm spaces alongside new restaurants and cafes.

5.4 Children's Services

Child-Friendly Medway

- 5.4.1 In 2025, Medway will be recognised as a Child Friendly City. We will ensure that children and young people are central to our plans outlined above. We will engage with Medway's children and young people throughout the development process, for all the capital projects and community programmes we are delivering. We will also engage with younger adults with a learning or physical disability to identify some of the challenges they may have faced growing up in Medway. This will support the development process, when we can consider how we overcome the challenges to further support children and young people in Medway.

Children's Social Care (incl. Improvement Programme)

- 5.4.2 We will have had a successful Ofsted inspection of our Children's Social Care, and continue on our journey to providing good, high-quality sustainable services. Services which will champion resilience and independence; working with families to focus on the family's and the child's strengths and supporting them to live happy and healthy lives free from harm.

5.5 Education

- 5.5.1 As Medway's population increases through significant house building, the 'reimagine' phase will see new education facilities built, as part of an increasingly diverse school system, providing increased choice for residents and an improved local community offer. Council officers will continue to support schools in line with relevant central government directives to create a

first-class education system across Medway, working collaboratively with schools and academy trusts together with FE colleges and universities.

5.6 Adult Social Care and Partnership Commissioning

5.6.1 The 'reimagine' phase will see us progressing our journey towards becoming 'Age-Friendly Medway'. This approach will ensure Medway is a great place to grow older, which will in turn improve the lives of older people. The ethos of Age Friendly Medway will be that older and disabled adults truly feel part of their community and are able to contribute not only to their neighbourhood but to Medway as a whole.

5.7 Culture, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage

5.7.1 If we are successful with our UK City of Culture bid for 2025, this will be a significant opportunity to 'reimagine' Medway on a national and international stage; reflecting on the amazing history of the area, whilst also envisioning our future, establishing Medway as a modern city fit for the 21st century.

5.7.2 We are also planning to develop a new state-of-the-art leisure facility on the Splashes site in Rainham, utilising environmentally friendly building methods to provide comprehensive and improved leisure facilities and health provision for the residents of Medway and beyond.

5.8 Climate Change

5.8.1 In 2030, we will be on our way to achieving Carbon Net Zero as a local authority and will effectively utilise green technology to improve efficiency across our own assets, through the One Estate Programme. In addition, we will have attracted a number of new and innovative green businesses to set up in the area, including at Medway Innovation Park, on the Hoo Peninsula and alongside our universities.

6. Risk Management

6.1 Since the Council implemented the Emergency Planning procedures in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, a risk assessment in line with the Council's Risk Management Strategy formed the basis of all decision making and governance arrangements throughout the response' phase. In addition, financial thresholds were agreed to ensure that where a decision being made would commit the Council to new expenditure or result in the loss of income, appropriate financial authorisation is in place.

6.2 A Governance group within the Cell structure was responsible for providing assurance on the effectiveness of risk management and the implications of actions taken through the Covid-19 response. While the Council's Corporate Risk Register Remains reflective of the key risks facing the organisation in the wider context, formal arrangements to monitor the Corporate Risk Register were paused during the initial response to enable staff to focus on managing risks in the Covid-19 Response. The Governance group will work alongside

the Strategic Risk Management Group to resume routine monitoring of strategic risks as soon as possible during, beginning with a fundamental review of the Corporate Risk Register in light of the Covid-19 Response and Recovery.

7. Financial implications

7.1 As services opened-up regular assessments of changes in activity levels with budgetary impacts continued to be undertaken. Key areas of focus were:

- Levels of income in services such as Parking, Leisure and Theatres.
- The impact of additional demand on services such as Adult Social Care and Children's services, especially in relation to anticipated demand for Mental Health services.

7.2 We will continue to use the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to meet the additional costs directly related to managing the outbreak from within the available grant allocation.

7.3 The asymptomatic testing programme was fully funded until end of June 2021, the programme continued to be funded by the Department for Health and Social Care under a new tariff system until the end of September 2021. Although there is not a guarantee of full cost recovery, the programme of delivery will be monitored to ensure that as far as possible we recover the cost of the programme, with any overspend being funded from COMF.

7.4 In terms of other areas of grant funding, there have been announcements about the continuation of a number of funding streams until the end of September 2021. These have been for specific areas such as Infection Control and Testing in care settings and an extension of the Covid-19 Local Support Grant.

7.5 The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding received in 2020/21 totalling £8.046 million was to fund support for businesses through to the end of the 2021/22 financial year, with the scheme in operation having been amended to reflect revisions made to the guidance from the Government over time. The balance of the grant not distributed in 2020/21 was rolled forward and available to support businesses throughout 2021/22.

7.6 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) process is underway and will capture updates of projections around levels of income in the key services mentioned previously, as well as anticipated growth in demand and market price increases including any contractual price increases. An update on the Council's Financial Outlook was considered by the Cabinet on 21 September 2021.

7.7 There have been no announcements about the continuation of any grant funding that is currently in place beyond the 2021/22 financial year. As a result, we are not currently forecasting that there will be additional grant funding available in 2022/23 to offset ongoing pressures caused by Covid-19.

8. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8.1 The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 19 August 2021 and its comments are set out as follows:

8.2 The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the Council's recovery from the Covid-19 global pandemic. It was noted that the approach was to resume services as soon as possible, ensuring that Medway emerges stronger and more resilient, making the most of opportunities to build back better. New ways of working and operational models would be adopted as the Council returned to business as usual.

8.3 The report outlined the three phases of the recovery plan, Rebound (2021-22), Rebuild (2022-23), and Reimagine (2024 onwards).

8.4 Members raised the following issues which were responded to:

The Council's membership of the Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce - Reference was made to quotes in the media from Locate in Kent that it would be working with Medway and clarification was sought on the success of the Council's engagement with such groups on skills, employment and economic development. Officers undertook to provide a response.

8.5 **Debt owed to Adult Social Care** – Asked what steps were being taken to reduce this debt, officers responded that that debt levels had increased whilst the Council had supported the hospital with swift discharge pathways to move patients from hospital and into care. It was noted that a lighter touch to debt collection had been taken throughout the pandemic but that this was now ending.

8.6 Concern was expressed that people did not realise that they would be expected to pay for their care package when they were discharged from hospital at the earliest opportunity and that this was causing additional hardship and levels of debt. Also, the new adult social care strategy relied too heavily on the support of the voluntary sector that was not in the position of resilience that it had been before the pandemic. Officers responded that funding from the CCG was available to facilitate hospital discharges. However, this had reduced to the first four weeks following a patient's discharge. There had been improvements in linking care and financial assessments but the volume of assessments required had been a challenge.

8.7 **Care Quality Commission suspension of assurance visits** – Officers clarified that this referred to care homes and not people within their own homes.

8.8 **Bus Back Better** – Clarification was sought on the Council's commitment to the bus back better aspirations set out in the National Bus Strategy. Officers confirmed that a service plan was being developed and this would be a priority for the Transport team in the coming months.

- 8.9 **Engagement with vulnerable children and families during the pandemic -** Officers said that the service had been trying to engage with those vulnerable families it was aware of, and whilst it had adapted to new ways of working, face-to-face contact was always preferable where possible.
- 8.10 **Support for Medway residents working from home -** Officers advised that the Council was working with broadband providers on how the providers could improve broadband accessibility across the borough. In addition, once a better sense of the new normal had been established in terms of people's working arrangements, initiatives such as sharing office space could be rolled out, initially with public sector partners.
- 8.11 **Establishing the new normal –** Questioned on how long it would be before the new normal emerged, officers advised that regular staff surveys were identifying issues to be addressed and a number of workstreams had been set up to facilitate the move to new ways of working in an informed way.
- 8.12 **The definition of hybrid meetings –** In response to a Member's comment that it must be ensured that all participants in a hybrid meeting could be clearly seen and heard, officers advised that a project group had recently been established to consider workforce development across the organisation. This would include agreeing some common definitions and terminology. In addition, the agreed capital programme made provision for investment in technology to ensure that meeting rooms were fit for purpose.
- 8.13 **Welcome back fund –** Officers confirmed that the Council's bid had been successful and £250k of funding had been provided. They agreed to provide Members with the detailed programme.
- 8.14 **Deep clean for High Streets –** Asked if this would extend beyond the five town centres to include other community high streets and shopping areas, officers agreed to provide a written response.
- 8.15 **Economy and infrastructure recovery cell -** It was questioned why UCA were not members of this place-based group when it was established. Officers agreed to provide a written response on whether organisations were invited to join or self-nominated.
- 8.16 **#WhoKnew –** Members would be provided with data on the success of this campaign.
- 8.17 **Medway's 25th anniversary -** A Member observed that these anniversaries would fall within pre-election periods and officers confirmed that celebrations would take place throughout the year and not during purdah.
- 8.18 **Future High Street fund bid –** Officers agreed to provide an update on the 2nd tranche bid for Gillingham High Street.

- 8.19 **Additional Restrictions Grant** – In response to a question on how this grant funding was being targeted, officers advised that £8m of funding had been received and that schemes 1 and 2 had been quite prescriptive. The Council was seeking to use this grant to encourage businesses to employ apprentices and it was therefore targeted at those who could demonstrate this. Members would be provided with the criteria.
- 8.20 **Turning the Tide Transformation Oversight Board** – Noting the high impact that Covid-19 was having on Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority populations and workforce, a Member highlighted the need for the Medway Diversity Forum and faith groups to be involved in the work of this board.
- 8.21 **Seeing is Believing programme for Child Friendly Medway** – Members would be provided with the programme.
- 8.22 **Medway Development Company (MDC) construction projects** – Asked about the creation of jobs for local people, officers advised that MDC was not a big employer of people but managed many construction projects and used the same procurement processes as the Council.
- 8.23 **Flexible working policies** – In response to a question about how staff who might be struggling with working from home were supported, officers responded that staff surveys had revealed that there were very high satisfaction rates for hybrid working arrangements. Where members of staff were experiencing difficulties, arrangements to enable them to return to the office were explored.
- 8.24 **Decision:**
- The Committee noted the overall approach set out in the report and the proposal to mainstream this activity into Business as Usual.
- 8.25 A Member briefing note has been prepared in response to the information requested by the Committee. This is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places certain legal responsibilities on public sector organisations to assist in the response and other phases of a civil emergency. Once the Covid-19 pandemic was treated as an emergency event, the Council had to comply with legal requirements as a category one responder. This included involvement in the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) at strategic and tactical levels with multi-agency partners to guide and deliver the Kent and Medway response.
- 9.2 In line with best practice, KRF and Medway Council began preparing for the recovery phase as soon as a civil emergency was declared. The Council has a key role in leading the local community back to such normality as is possible after any emergency event. This report has set out in detail how we plan to do this in Medway.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the comments of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny, as set out in section 8 of the report.
- 10.2 It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the overall approach set out in the report and the proposal to mainstream this activity into Business as Usual.

11. Suggested Reasons for Decision

- 11.1 To highlight the role that the Council has played in responding to Covid-19 as well as supporting the process in place for managing the restarting of services post lockdown and longer-term recovery.

Lead officer contact

Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director Culture and Community, Gun Wharf
Tel: 01634 331021 Email: dee.orourke@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Briefing Note to Member of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background papers

None