

Ashford Borough Council

Decisions taken by the Cabinet on 30th July 2020

Minute No	Topic	Decision
24	Recovery Plan	<p>The Leader introduced the report which presented the Council's draft Recovery Plan 2020. The Plan set out the Council's approach to making a timely and successful recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Plan reflected the difficult and challenging times ahead and the opportunities that were arising as the Council recovered from the pandemic as an organisation and a local leader. He explained that Officers had worked extremely hard to pull this document together and it looked to embrace the recovery, but also to integrate that into building a stronger local economy, focus on the green agenda and a pledge to achieve carbon neutrality, and detail everything the Council was doing to provide a vibrant Borough for the future. The plan had been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and there would be strong control and monitoring mechanisms with a Monitoring and Advisory Board chaired by the Deputy Leader. This would be meeting bi-monthly and report to the Cabinet and Full Council regularly, as well as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and meetings with Group Leaders.</p> <p>The Deputy Leader said he wanted to speak in support of the Plan and draw out the importance of the work that was planned or already underway. The Plan included a series of very tangible benefits for the Borough, not least in terms of community recovery. All would be aware of the community spirit demonstrated during the pandemic, but new partnerships would have to be created and it would be dangerous to assume that the positive energy to come out of the pandemic would continue without work. This was demonstrated by the community recovery projects set out in Section 6.2 of the Plan, for example the projects at Bockhanger and Beaver. He also drew particular attention to the support provided by the Lifeline service and the progress towards providing temporary accommodation at Henwood as well as the existing Christchurch House scheme.</p>

	<p>Members asked about targets, priorities and performance indicators. It was explained there were a series of actions and Key Performance Indicators under each of the four themes in the Plan. The corporate suite of KPIs, which were monitored on a regular basis, had been embedded in to the Plan. It was a robust Plan with key measurements embedded and it would be coming back to Members on a quarterly basis. The Ward Member for Bockhanger considered that the Plan must have specific targets and measures against each individual priority action if those analysing the data, including residents, were to understand where the Council was in its recovery. This would be extremely important. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications said she was pleased to advise that work had been done on action planning and setting KPI targets and milestones against every action in the Recovery Plan. This was a level of detail which was felt a little too much for this particular report, but she would be happy to share that with the Member concerned outside of the meeting.</p> <p>On the community recovery section, a Member considered there were some “easy wins” around majoring on community facilities across the Borough. These could deliver income generation, equalities objectives, carbon reduction and job creation by way of units for start-up businesses, and there was a real opportunity for the Council to make a difference if this was specifically included in the Recovery Plan. The Leader responded that much was already happening by way of community facility improvements but they had to be realistic and it would not be possible to provide new facilities across the Borough as part of a Recovery Plan where the focus should be on helping to get the economy back on track. The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Tourism advised that it was important to point out that community facilities and spaces were not just about physical buildings. Buildings were obviously vital, but the Council was also providing and investing in other community spaces including at some of the bigger projects at Victoria Park, Conningbrook Park and Discovery Park. It was important to note that projects such as these would live on in the community and for the Council. The Council provided a lot of advice to third parties and any groups that wanted to come forward with ideas on how they could form community groups and</p>
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	<p>facilities would be welcomed.</p> <p>A Member said he was concerned about an absence in the Plan of measures to address a possible second ‘spike’ of the virus later in 2020, or the possibility of a localised lockdown for Ashford or East Kent. The Leader responded that whilst it was difficult to make predictions about what would happen, there had been many discussions about second waves and localised outbreaks and they had certainly ‘hoped for the best, but planned for the worst’. The Council had its ACER Committee which could be re-convened at short notice and they continued to work closely with KCC and the Kent Resilience Forum (including the emergency services and the Government) so there was no chance that the Council would be caught by surprise. The Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing advised that the Council’s response work on Covid-19 had not stopped and would run alongside the Recovery Plan. She stated that the Council’s Business Continuity Management Team continued to meet twice a week to address the ongoing Covid-19 situation. There were additional plans in place to deal with potential local lockdowns/outbreaks and response work was continuing separately behind the scenes.</p> <p>A Member questioned why the report indicated that there were no negative equality impacts highlighted from the Covid-19 outbreak? The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications clarified that there were no negative equality impacts identified in terms of the actions included within the Recovery Plan. This assessment did not refer to the impact of the outbreak.</p> <p>There was a discussion around potential ‘digital exclusion’ and the negative impact on the elderly, disabled, poor, or those in rural areas, of moving more services digitally, when those people did not have access to good quality broadband or may not have the necessary skills to participate. A Member considered there should be more reference to this in the Recovery Plan and she worried about the challenges and barriers that were potentially being placed in front of some people as everything moved towards a more digital age. The Leader said that whilst he sympathised with the comments made,</p>
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		<p>he considered the Council was doing everything it could in this regard. There were reports later on this agenda about broadband and a Fibre to the Premises Supplementary Planning Document. This was a caring Council which had already led on things outside of this Plan like space standards, 'Changing Places' toilets for the disabled and being aware that digital solutions were not the panacea for all, so they had clearly demonstrated their commitment to inclusion and equalities. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications advised that the Plan did also contain some design principles around meeting customer needs in the future and ensuring services were accessible for all, and these had been embedded in to the Plan.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Housing provided an update on some of the measures the General Fund was undertaking to support the Housing Revenue Account and its homelessness position in the current situation.</p> <p>Resolved:</p> <p>That</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, and the Recovery and Monitoring Group, to vary the delivery plan programme in order to expedite a timely response to changing circumstances to support the recovery of local residents, communities and businesses. (ii) the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the relevant Portfolio Holder, to commence delivery of the Recovery Plan prior to it being recommended for adoption at Full Council in October. (iii) the reallocation of Business Rate Pool funding (Economic Growth) from the Town Centre framework projects to the focus on the economic recovery priorities within the Recovery Plan delivery, be
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		<p>noted.</p> <p>(iv) the long term ambition for the Borough be noted and agreed.</p> <p>(v) the Ashford Ambition Report (Shaping a Prosperous, Sustainable and Inclusive Future for the Borough in 2030 and Beyond) be noted as the evidence base for the forthcoming Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <p>That the Recovery Plan be adopted as the main strategic document of the Council for the next 18 months.</p>
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