

## Agenda Item No: 4



### Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## The councils response to the Covid-19 pandemic and draft Recovery Plan 2020

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### The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. Note the report outlining the borough council's response to date to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  2. Note the lessons learnt during the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic as presented at this meeting.
  3. Receive the council's draft Recovery Plan 2020 for consultation.
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**Date of O&S meeting:** 11 August 2020

**Chair of O&S Committee:** Cllr. Noel Ovenden

**Relevant Portfolio(s):** Cllr. Gerry Clarkson  
The Leader  
Cllr. Peter Feacey  
Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing

**Summary:** This report brings together three phases of the council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. The response itself and a detailed account of how the council's role is provided in the report 'The Council's Emergency Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic'.
2. The lessons that have been learnt during the council's response. A presentation will be provided to the Committee to provide an overview of the lessons learnt and how they will inform the way the council responds to emergencies in the future.
3. The council's draft Recovery Plan 2020 that has been developed to provide a framework to enable a timely and structured recovery from the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This Committee is being consulted on the draft Plan and will be asked to make any recommendations at its next meeting in September in advance of the draft

Plan being submitted for approval to the Full Council  
in October 2020.

**Exempt from  
Publication:** **NO**

**Background Papers:** As set out in the individual reports on the agenda for this  
Committee.

**Contact:** [Lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk)  
[Sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk)

## **Report Title: The Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, lessons learnt and draft Recovery Plan 2020.**

### **Introduction and Background**

1. This report provides an overarching summary of two reports and a presentation which detail the council's emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic; the lessons learnt during the response and; the council's plans for recovery going forward. The report also explains the next steps for the adoption of the Recovery Plan 2020. Full details of each element are provided within the individual reports and the presentation that will be provided at the Committee meeting.

#### *The council's emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic*

2. The first report (Appendix A) which was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 25 June, documents the borough council's emergency response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The report includes details of the command and control arrangements, the establishment of the Ashford Response Depot, the Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal, the assistance provided to those on NHS shield lists and other vulnerable people, and the grant support arrangements for the voluntary sector. The report outlines the significant steps taken to keep essential services running as well as responding to immediate emergency needs.

#### *Lessons learnt from the Covid-19 Pandemic*

3. Whilst work continues to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak, a review is also underway to ensure that lessons learnt are captured so we are prepared in the event of a second or other unforeseen event in the future. Understanding the lessons learnt is an ongoing process whilst we continue to respond to the needs of our communities, but officers will provide a presentation to the Committee at this meeting to summarise the key learning that has been captured to-date and how it will be used.

#### *Recovery Plan 2020*

4. The final report on this agenda (Appendix B), the council's draft Recovery Plan 2020, was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 30 July 2020. The Plan sets out the council's approach for how, over the next 18 months, it will make a timely and successful recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic; the Plan reflects the difficult and challenging times ahead and the opportunities as we recover from the pandemic as an organisation and local leader.

5. The Cabinet has recommended to the Council that the Recovery Plan 2020 is adopted. The Recovery Plan is being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee now in order to allow time for it to be fully digested before further consideration is given at the September meeting to any recommendations it may wish to make to Council.

## **Conclusion**

6. This report brings together details of the enormous effort made during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, reflects on that response and sets out the draft Recovery Plan 2020. The Committee will have a further opportunity at its September meeting to consider the draft Recovery Plan in advance of it being adopted at Full Council in October.

## **Contact and Email**

7. [Lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk)
8. [Sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk)

**Agenda Item No:** 9  
**Report To:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 25 June 2020  
**Report Title:** **COVID-19 Response**  
**Report Author & Job Title:** Sheila Davison  
Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing  
**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Peter Feacey  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Community Safety and Wellbeing



**Summary:** Report documenting the borough council's emergency response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The report includes details of the command and control arrangements, the establishment of the Ashford Response Depot, the Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal, the assistance provided to those on NHS shield lists and other vulnerable people, and grant support arrangements for the voluntary sector. The report outlines the significant steps taken to keep essential services running as well as responding to immediate emergency needs.

**Key Decision:** NO

**Significantly Affected Wards:** All wards

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the report outlining the borough council's response to date to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- II. Pay tribute to our residents, businesses, wider communities, volunteers and staff for all the support and help they have provided, the sacrifices they have made, and the personal challenges they have and continue to face as a result of the COVID-19.**

**Policy Overview:** While the Government coordinates the national response, it is clear that district councils have a major role in leading local efforts in response to the pandemic. At the heart of this is the need to continue providing priority services to residents and businesses as well as responding to the unique demands posed by the pandemic.

**Financial Implications:** The financial impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the council is significant but outside the scope of this report. This report

only addresses expenditure that is directly attributable to the response phase to date. It does not address wider financial aspects e.g. loss of income.

**Legal Implications:** The council's response has been informed by the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 as well as other relevant provisions covering health and safety, community safety and data protection. This report does not however address the wide range of enforcement, transactional, and litigation issues faced in responding to COVID-19.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:** This report outlines immediate action taken as a consequence of the COVID-19 emergency. The action taken has been guided by the differing needs of our community and differing impacts experienced. Equality has been at the forefront of the response.

**Data Protection Impact Assessment:** Not applicable

**Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):** The COVID-19 response has been the subject of on-going risk assessment against the strategic goals to:

1. Protect our community (people and businesses)
2. Protect our staff
3. Maintain core service delivery
4. Prepare for longer term recovery

The council's ability to respond to an additional business continuity incident or emergency situation has also been reviewed in the context of the COVID-19 incident.

**Sustainability Implications:** While outside the scope of this report, the COVID-19 outbreak has significant sustainability implications. Cleaner air, burgeoning urban wildlife, and a shift to less carbon-intensive ways of life show what can be achieved in such a short time. There is an opportunity to make a transformation towards a more sustainable society and set our climate trajectory for the future. The council will, through its COVID-19 recovery plan, corporate plan, and carbon neutrality strategy, look to support this transformation.

**Other Material Implications:** There have been substantial implications for staff as a consequence of the outbreak, most notably the move to home and virtual working, accelerated digital transformation that has happened, and for many, a temporary change of role upon deployment to support the emergency response.

**Exempt from Publication:** **NO**

**Background  
Papers:**

**None**

**Contact:**

sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330224

## Report Title: COVID-19 Response

### Introduction and Background

1. COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on every aspect of our lives from the perspectives of our nation, local community and immediate friends and families. That impact will be felt for many years. There is no doubt that it will shape the future course of the council as we move forward with recovery.
2. The overriding priority, like that of the Government, has been to save lives. To that end the council has focused on a response that protects life and minimises impact upon our essential services and local economy. This has been achieved by mitigating risks to the public and supporting agencies who are working equally hard towards these objectives. We have sought to keep people informed and share accurate and consistent guidance and information.
3. The purpose of this report is to document the borough council's business continuity and emergency response to the COVID-19 outbreak. While much of this information has already been shared with members and is already in the public domain, it represents an opportunity to address the totality of the response to date, provide update on the various transition arrangements that are in operation (i.e. those arrangements and services that are operating specifically as a response to the emergency) and introduce longer-term recovery plans.
4. The report includes details of the following:
  - a. Command and control, governance, and partnership arrangements including our business continuity incident management; links to the Kent Local Resilience Forum; collaboration with the county, police, health service, and critically the community and voluntary sector.
  - b. Support for residents including the establishment and operation of the Ashford Response Depot; the Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal; the assistance provided to those on the NHS shield lists and other vulnerable people (for example homeless/rough sleepers) through the 'hub' model, and grant support arrangements for the voluntary sector.
  - c. Support for businesses including business rate reductions and reliefs, SME grants, communication and reassurance plus assistance to open our high streets.
  - d. Maintenance of council services including managing staff sickness and new working arrangements, redeployment to critical services, management capacity, remote working, financial management associated with loss of returns from income-generating services, and administration pressures in key services.

## **Command and control, governance, and partnership arrangements**

### **The Ashford Critical Emergency Resilience Committee**

5. Overall command and control of the council's response to the outbreak has been led by the Ashford Critical Emergency Resilience (ACER) Committee. ACER met for the first time just ahead of Public Health England (PHE) confirming the first case of COVID-19 in Kent on the 2 March. On the 12 March COVID-19 was declared a worldwide pandemic.
6. ACER, which consists elected members and senior officers, ensures that our response to emergencies is coordinated and that we are in the strongest position to protect our residents, businesses and staff. ACER has regularly met throughout the outbreak and has been instrumental in guiding and supporting the council's response.
7. Three further groups were formed to provide support in delivering ACER's strategic objectives, namely the Emergency Support Group (ESG), Business Support Group (BSG) and Communications & Intelligence Group (CIG). The work of these groups is addressed later in this report.

### **The Business Continuity Management Team**

8. Day to day operational control has been provided by the council's Business Continuity Incident Management Team (BCIMT) which, in the case of this emergency, involved the whole Management Team. The BCIMT met on a daily basis throughout the early stages of the outbreak, reducing recently to three days a week.
9. Key activities undertaken by the BCIMT include:
  - Receiving and evaluating information from the Kent Local Resilience Form (LRF) and other external groups relevant to the local response.
  - Providing information to central government via the LRF on the situation within the council and borough in order to form the county Common Operating Picture (COP) and contribute to wider national assessments. Not only has this process ensure that decisions are made on the basis of commonly shared information, it also enables the council to determine necessary actions that require local delivery.
  - Reviewing the progress of, and issues for consideration, in the council's internal groups such as the ESG, BSG and CIG to guide future activity.
  - Identifying issues facing the borough and undertaking risk assessments setting tasks/objectives to be achieved and identifying hazards. Risk assessment was conducted throughout the incident and remains ongoing.
  - Maintaining a daily review of the council's business continuity position for each of the major service areas. Key to this has been the monitoring of staff sickness and self-isolation in order to organise cover where necessary. Any concerns for services were flagged immediately so that support could be provided to keep essential services operational. This daily communication

and review also ensured that we could update our community on changes to critical services.

- Reviewing and maintaining an action log and providing a record of the decisions being taken.
- Coordinating the flow of information to ACER.

### **The Kent Local Resilience Forum**

10. At a county level, the borough council is worked closely with the Kent Local Resilience Forum (KRF) attending all Kent Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) meetings. On the 19 March the KRF classified COVID-19 as an Emergency under the Civic Contingencies Act 2004 and as a Major Incident. The status of the incident is regularly reviewed by the SCG.
11. In the early stages of the outbreak the group met on a daily basis (including weekends). This group brings together all key public sector players including Kent Public Health, NHS, KCC, Ambulance Service, Police and the district councils. The SCG are in contact with a wider network of resilience forums which link into central government.
12. The SCG is supported by the Kent LRF Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) on which the borough council is represented. As the name implies, their responsibility has been to implement the strategic decisions of the SCG. In daily meetings, the SCG and TCG have addressed, and continue to address, a huge array of issues in this dynamic and changing situation. Members of both groups are in regular contact with each other in order to implement agreed actions. As of the 15 June, the SCG and TCG now meet twice a week.
13. Heads of service are also supporting a number of focused response groups established by the LFR. These include a community cell, supply chain/PPE cell, and communication cell.
14. The Chief Executive has been in regular contact with her counterparts across Kent throughout the emergency in order to share information and undertake dynamic risk assessments. Needless to say, the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council have been in daily contact and have worked closely to address the challenges in a measured and effective way.
15. Further information on the Kent LRF is provided at <https://www.kentprepared.org.uk/about-us>. On this website it is possible to read more about the LRF activity relevant to the COVID-19 outbreak.

### **Business Continuity**

16. In order to maintain our statutory and essential services throughout the pandemic, the council has drawn on its well-established and tested business continuity and emergency planning arrangements. All services have business continuity plans which have been supplemented by additional arrangements specific to COVID-19. This has necessitated services working in very different ways, including greater remote working, use of enhanced personal protective equipment, and rapid deployment of digital services.

17. What has been particularly impressive is the level of cross service working which has enabled the council to continue providing near-normal services and support recovery challenges. Staff have worked above and beyond to continue providing vital services as well undertaking some very unusual tasks. Staff have used their skills, and the positive working relationships they have built over many years, to support each other and achieve the near impossible.

## **Protecting the community – our residents**

### **Emergency Support Group (ESG)**

18. To ensure support to people in the community, the council's ESG continue to work with its various partners, in particular the Ashford Volunteer Centre (AVC), to bring our range of voluntary and community groups together, co-ordinating the assistance they can give to those who are most in need of help.
19. Under the direction of the ESG three sub cells have focused on:
  - contact and support for those shielding and those who requested help,
  - setting up and running the Ashford Response Depot (ARD), and
  - liaison and support for the voluntary sector including grant aid.

### **Supporting those who are shielded and others requiring help**

20. In the first weeks of the emergency, local authorities were asked by the Government to provide a 'stopgap' for food deliveries and essential provisions (including specific dietary requirements) for those in need of immediate support (i.e. the shielded). This was required whilst the Government's delivery service was being mobilised. District Councils set up their own local hubs in varying ways, some in partnership with the voluntary sector, others completely on their own, and some, like Ashford, using a mix of voluntary both the shielded and those requesting help.
21. Ashford used its normal customer contact telephone number for residents and community groups to request help. Our customer contact staff called those on the Government/NHS shielded list and, as the lists received from the Government increased, additional capacity was secured by drawing on staff from across all services (totalling 70 trained callers).
22. In total 4,733 residents were contacted between 27 March and 22 May. During this period officers gathered relevant information and strengthened guidance on our website in order to offer the following:
  - Links to local voluntary and community groups (local shopping, foodbanks, prescription collections) <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/your-community/emergency-planning/health-and-pandemics/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-help-for-community-groups/list-of-voluntary-and-community-groups/>.

- Assistance with the shield.gov.uk process and government food parcel registration.
  - Assistance from Welfare Intervention Officers for universal credit applications or other financial assistance.
  - Referral to relevant team/authority/specialist provider for welfare or medical needs.
  - Allocation to GOODSAM (Government NHS volunteers) or KCC wardens for prescription collection and delivery.
  - Advice on local food banks services.
  - Information on food supply options such as supermarket delivery slots for priority customers and details of local food suppliers and local takeaway business'.
  - Emergency food parcels and essential supplies from the Ashford Response Depot.
23. The 'one number' approach has allowed us to provide a simple system for those seeking assistance. Recently notifications from the Government of those who are shielded has stabilised at around 4,750 people. We are expecting this to continue to ease meaning existing customer contact staff are managing to call residents and refer as required without the need for additional call handlers. The more complex cases being referred to our welfare intervention officers. Support is now classified as:
- Tier 1: Those 'shielded' (identified as medically vulnerable)
  - Tier 2: Those who are self-isolating due to age or other reasons
  - Tier 3: Those who are vulnerable in other ways e.g. having financial or welfare concerns.
24. Support provided by volunteers has been critical for all tiers. Capturing details of local community groups and public sector services at an early stage of the pandemic has allowed ESG to refer those in need to local or Kent voluntary support. A partnership approach with Ashford Volunteer Centre provided advice and guidance for volunteers and voluntary organisations including funding sources, operational guidance and signposting for those wishing to volunteer. This has enabled a robust network of community groups to operate across the borough.
25. In addition, a council grant support scheme has helped community groups across the borough to pay for supplies and helped them to continue operating despite a fall in income as a result of reduced fund-raising opportunities.

### **Ashford Response Depot**

26. The depot holds a range of essential food, cleaning items, toiletries, and dietary specific items that has been donated by local supermarkets and purchased with funds donated to the response appeal and the council directly.

27. The depot is operated by council staff who have been redeployed from their normal duties, working to form boxes of household essentials which are delivered to those in the community who urgently require them.
28. As of 2 June, over 470 deliveries have been made. The actual number of boxes is much higher as larger family households may receive several boxes of food and other essential supplies. Our data collection has highlighted that the majority of referrals to the Ashford Response Depot were initially 'shielded' residents awaiting parcels or those who did not know how to get a government parcel. Referral requests are now reducing as the gov.uk shield parcel system and online priority shopping slots become more effective.
29. Additionally, through targeted advice we help residents secure food supplies. For example, through using online shopping, utilising local volunteer shopping assistance, and through referral to the GOODSAM (NHS volunteer service). Furthermore, the council has volunteered to support a pilot scheme run by our customer contact centre allowing the council to refer customers in need for priority supermarket delivery slots. This went live on 26 May.
30. Updates to the website have included signposting to targeted support and self-help.
31. All information collected, including call data, vulnerability levels, and types of need, has been mapped. This allows the council to understand what type of need is required and where. A live database, developed by the Policy team, supports gap analysis and remains a vital tool to the project as recovery continues.
32. The range of support to various residents and community groups has been well received and the council has received very positive feedback on how it has responded to the pandemic.

### **Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal (VERA)**

33. The Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal was launched at the beginning of April, supported by a multi-media marketing campaign to encourage donations from individuals and business.
34. Donations as of 16 June to VERA stood at £8,645 from 67 generous sponsors, which is 85% of our target of £10,000.

### **Community Funding**

35. On the 3 April, the council introduce a funding scheme for voluntary groups in need of financial assistance. Within two weeks, the council had awarded £17,300 worth of emergency grants to 13 not-for-profit groups across the borough.
36. A support fund of up to £3,000 was established to bolster the resilience of local organisations following closure/loss of income and other COVID-19 impacts. The grants awarded could be spent on any of the organisation's costs including core costs and overheads.

37. Recipients included the Ashford Volunteer Centre who received a £3,000 support grant towards funding core activities; Tenterden Social Hub received £2,500 to help fund their overheads so they could continue to provide key services such as meals on wheels and community transport; and Pilgrims Hospices received £3,000 which enabled them to provide extra beds in the Ashford hospice, as well as cover some of the losses from their planned fundraising activities in the borough.
38. A separate project fund was made available for projects and services. Up to £200 was made available to organisations and individuals providing direct support to Ashford residents. These grants covered the purchase of goods or equipment or volunteer expenses.
39. As of 12 May, the total amount of funding agreed for the grants is £60,000 for the Support Fund and £5,000 for the Project Fund. The following table shows what has been approved up to 7 May.

Fund category	Number of approved applications	Total approved funding	Remaining Fund Available (£)
Support Fund	26	£51,950	£8,050
Project Fund	13	£2,587	£2,413

### Help and community emails

40. Several new email accounts were created in early April to help manage our communications with partners and the public. This included [community@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:community@ashford.gov.uk) which helps individuals and groups wanting to support their community and [help@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:help@ashford.gov.uk) for residents who need the council's help in some way.

### Signposting to Voluntary Groups

41. As indicated above the council has been signposting people to relevant groups where they can get help. We have collated information from various sources to understand who may be in need of assistance due to non-medical reasons such as financial hardship or digital exclusion. The data has included the elderly, isolated, those with children, the financially vulnerable, and those with poor internet connection. People have also been directed to us via Kent County Council.

### Communication

42. From the start of the outbreak, information regarding the council's COVID-19 response has been provided on the council's website, through daily social media messages, regular press releases, and public responses to press enquires.
43. At the beginning of June, a special edition of the *Ashford For You* magazine was delivered to homes across the borough. This eight-page special edition included messages from the Mayor, Leader of the Council and Chief Executive. The publication focused on the enormous efforts by the council to support our

community in a time of crisis. A spotlight was shone on our voluntary and community champions who have gone the extra mile in the crisis, and residents were signposted to further information, support and advice.

### **Recognising our community champions**

44. In late May, the council launched the Ashford Applause initiative. This recognises people who have done amazing things to help their communities during this challenging time. Many nominations are being received for Ashford Applause, which is being organised in partnership with Loveashford. It is our way of honouring local community champions.
45. Ashford Applause was featured on BBC Radio Kent during a segment of the programme called 'Making a Difference' which highlights ways in which individuals and groups are making a wonderful contribution to the community during the COVID-19 crisis.
46. Nominations are open to all, whether a dedicated key worker on the frontline, a selfless volunteer delivering food parcels, or a neighbour collecting shopping, prescriptions or cooking meals for others. Each week over the next 10 weeks, a community champion will be selected at random from entries received and their story showcased on Loveashford, our websites, and our social media channels, in recognition of their hard work. We currently have two community champions who have received an Ashford Applause and given a personalised hand drawn digital portrait by a local artist.

### **Support for testing and track and trace**

47. From early May the council's Stour Centre car park has been used as a mobile testing centre. The centre has been managed by the army, with assistance being provide by council staff. The mobile facility has allowed for hundreds of people who were showing symptoms to be tested. Each visit has been for two to three days and has enabled our residents to access tests without needing to travel further afield.
48. As of the 15 June a drive-through Regional Testing Centre is operating from our new car park at Victoria Road, Ashford. This is part of the Government's programme to increase testing across the UK. The council is pleased to play its part by making the Victoria Road site available for this new regional testing centre.
49. The council is also hoping to support Public Health England to manage local outbreaks and assist with the track and trace programme. The exact nature of this work has yet to be determined, however, the council is providing feedback on the draft Local Outbreak Control Plan which is helping finalise local arrangements.

### **Protecting the community – our businesses**

50. Supporting business has been, and remains, a strategic priority for the council. During early April, letters were sent to nearly 3,000 local businesses inviting them to apply for rate relief and business grants announced by the government.

51. All eligible businesses who have applied for the government's COVID-19 support grants have now been paid. In a short timeframe, necessary systems were designed, implemented and administered by the council's Revenues and Benefits team with support from colleagues across the council.
52. As of 28 May, the council has paid out almost £26m to over 2,169 businesses, which is over 90% of known eligible businesses, providing support at a time when they need our help the most. We are proud to have been able to make these payments so quickly and are grateful to the officers whose hard work has made this possible. Further details of both the business grants and rates relief is provided below.
53. With the number of applications reducing, and payments up-to-date, the business support team are now contacting any business who applied but were either ineligible for the grant or who did not provide all the information required for us to pay them in order to understand if support can be provided.
54. The council have paid out grants to 88% of the public houses in the borough who are eligible for the grants and have encouraged the remaining ones to apply as soon as possible.

#### **Grants and rates relief**

#### **Total to date since 23 March (up to 28 May)**

Companies who have received grants	2,169
Value of Grants provided	£26 million
No of businesses receiving additional business rates relief	880
Business support Coronavirus webpage hits	7,015
Business Rates Grant webpage hits	7,439
ABC COVID-19 business social media impressions	29,759
AshfordFor COVID-19 social media posts	34
AshfordFor COVID-19 impressions for posts	21,844

#### **Small business grants**

55. As of 28 May, businesses ineligible for previous grant schemes or other reliefs are being invited to apply for the Ashford discretionary grants scheme. The scheme is for businesses within the borough that have experienced loss during the current emergency. The council has around £1.4m available for distribution.
56. The council had received 120 applications as of 5 June. Awards of between £1,000 and £10,000 will be provided to qualifying businesses who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak but were ineligible for the government's other business grant scheme or rate relief. The scheme is initially prioritising charities, bed and breakfasts, businesses in shared spaces, and market traders. Additional sectors will be considered if funds remain after this initial phase is complete.
57. Currently 2,132 grants have been paid to a value of £25,445,000. More than 90% of eligible businesses have been paid.

58. Alongside providing financial support, contact has been made with around 2,000 local businesses to provide guidance on COVID-19 recovery including helping them to prepare for reopening.

### **Reopening our High Streets in Ashford and Tenterden**

59. As of 15 June, additional support has been provided to assist the reopening our high streets in both Ashford and Tenterden. Utilising the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund, the council has access to an allocated fund of £116,814 to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in our high streets.
60. Our action plan, which is now in operation, includes:
- A comprehensive communications plan to support the message that Ashford and Tenterden High Streets are open for business, and to raise confidence in the safety measures being introduced.
  - Provision of information and materials to support the safe opening of businesses such as posters, vinyl floor markers, and risk assessment templates.
  - Daily Environmental Health presence in the High Street the week following re-opening non-essential retail and the week following the reopening of food & drink and other business venues.
  - Provision of advice and resources to businesses on reopening safely, managing queuing, reduce risks, prevent incident reports etc.
  - Additional High Street and public toilet cleansing and the reopening of the public toilet at New Street in Ashford.
  - Establishment of public-use hand sanitiser stations at Park Mall (High Street entrance) and at Tenterden Town Council (High Street).
  - Parking bay suspensions in Tenterden High Street in order to increase space for social distancing where particular pinch-points have been identified.
  - Addressing pavement obstructions caused by A-Boards where necessary.
  - Installation of additional general social distancing signage in High Streets.
61. Funding is available for 12 months with claims and evidence of expenditure being submitted on a quarterly basis to the Government. The effectiveness of measures being applied will be locally reviewed and modified as necessary over the course of the year. We will take into account feedback from residents, visitors and businesses particularly on additional steps that could be taken. The action plan was developed in conjunction with Tenterden Town Council and we thank them for their support helping to reopen our high streets.

### **Maintenance of council services**

62. A strategic goal for the council has been to maintain its essential services and, wherever possible, operate services as normal.

63. Since the start of the outbreak, the council has adapted the way in which it operates. This has been necessary to protect both the public and employees from COVID-19 infection. At the start of the outbreak, steps were immediately taken to reduce the risk of transmission between staff, members, and the public. Visible change was seen in the closure of the civic centre at the end of March and halting face-to-face meetings and site visits. For staff, this meant working remotely and, for some, taking new roles in support of the COVID-19 response.
64. Visits requiring face-to-face contact were temporarily paused and officers of the council conducted detailed risk assessments for all activities to identify ways to reduce the risk of infection for the public and employees. Remarkably, the majority of services have continued and staff have risen to the challenge of COVID-19 and the emergency response.
65. Another significant challenge for the council was the move to virtual meetings to which the public have remove access. On the 22 April, the council held its first public virtual meeting (a planning committee meeting) which was followed on the 28 May by the first virtual cabinet meeting including full debates on a number of reports. Ashford was one of the very first in the country to have a full virtual planning meeting and this proactive approach has enabled the council to meet government advice to use new powers to ensure we continue to make decisions, important to our community and economy.
66. A list of service changes and updates have been maintained throughout the outbreak on the council's website at <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/your-community/emergency-planning/health-and-pandemics/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-service-disruption/>.
67. A service delivery update was provided to ACER on 11 May in order to provide a picture of how services are being maintained, or delivered in a slightly different way, to our residents. This is reproduced at Appendix A with suitable updates where necessary.

## **Supporting our staff**

### **Remote working**

68. Our primary goal to support staff working from home was to ensure everyone was working safely and had the necessary equipment available to do their job. All staff were asked to carry out a Display Screen Equipment assessment which informed the council of any additional equipment or measures that were necessary to keep staff safe. A follow up assessment a few weeks later was conducted to check understanding and identify emerging issues.

From a management perspective, our approach started with an 'assumption of positive intent' i.e. that staff wanted homeworking arrangements to work and were keen to ensure this was the case. Key to maintaining motivation was ensuring daily contact between managers and their team member in order to understand staff's personal experience of the lockdown, to identify any practical issues such as IT equipment, set-up etc and provide general support to their work.

69. Managers provide a daily report to HR of those unwell or with COVID-19 symptoms and those with a household member with symptoms. This made sure we were able to support the staff member with advice, guidance, and information regarding testing. The daily COVID-19 absence report enabled the identification and resolution of any resilience and resource allocation in an effective way.
70. Staff capacity was recorded by managers to ensure staff could be redeployed where required to support the COVID-19 response. Roles included those supporting the depot, assisting with calls to vulnerable residents or analysing and cleansing support line data.
71. As the crisis unfolded, we became increasingly aware of the potential welfare impact on staff working at home during the lockdown. We quickly introduced a programme covering physical, mental, and financial wellbeing. Staff were provided with support and encouragement regarding multiple elements of their home-working experience, including home-schooling of children, home office set up, mental-health in isolation, and coping with financial pressures. This was delivered remotely using existing online systems.
72. The council introduced some additional flexibility for all staff in response to the exceptional circumstances created by COVID-19. This included removing flexitime bandwidth so that staff can work their hours around childcare and other practical issues (e.g. access to suitable desk space at home or broadband, for example) and permitting reduced hours on a temporary basis for staff who have exceptional childcare pressures.
73. Additionally, the Chief Executive and other Senior Officers provided staff with regular updates on our response and business as usual issues. This ensured staff understood how important their role was, whether it be as part of the response or in keeping crucial services operating.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

74. The health and safety of our staff during the COVID-19 outbreak has been of paramount importance. From the outset, a PPE logistics process cell was established to support the identification of the PPE needs, procurement and stock distribution. This used a risk-based approach and following relevant government guidance. The cell involves three key council teams working closely to meet the considerable PPE challenges.
75. The council's internal health & safety team have been at the forefront of identifying PPE needs and continue working with services to establish ongoing requirements. The team are advising on service risk assessments which ensure employees are protected from accidents and injury which could happen especially when working in very different roles and different ways. The risk assessment includes taking all reasonable steps to protect our employees and others from COVID-19 and ensuring we have followed relevant guidance from Government. Working with the health and safety team, services are reviewing their risk assessments as lockdown starts to lift.
76. The newly formed stock and distribution team have been key in ensuring stock levels of PPE are recorded and maintained. As part of their efforts, a stock and

distribution centre has been established from which the collection, delivery and disposal of PPE for services are managed. The team have received around £25,000 in PPE stocks.

77. During the height of the COVID-19 crisis, the procurement team met daily. More recently, they have met twice a week to source PPE through recognised procurement routes. In addition, our own officers have used their own supply chain intelligence to source supplementary PPE. We have received large and valuable donations from local business who at that time were unable to use the PPE that they had.
78. As we move further through the COVID-19 pandemic, our position, management and allocation of PPE will continuously be assessed.

## Expenditure Implications

79. The full financial implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on the council's budget were reported to Cabinet on the 28 May. Full monitoring of the first two months of the current budget has been completed.
80. The following table show current expenditure as directly related to COVID-19 expenditure:

Housing - homelessness services	£100,000
COVID-19 Response Expenditure (Shielding, PPE etc.)	£139,232*
Grants to Community Groups	£65,000
Cultural & related - Sports, leisure and community facilities	£200,000
Finance & corporate - ICT & remote working	£85,000
<b>Total emergency response expenditure</b>	<b>£589,232</b>

\* The total PPE spend as of 2 June stood at £25,119. Additional PPE was kindly donated to the council.

## Community Impact Assessment

81. It is recognised that COVID-19 has impacted every individual and family across the borough. New evidence is emerging about the nature and extent of this impact and this is being used to inform current decision making as well as being reflected in the council's developing recovery plan. Supporting those who are particularly vulnerable, taking into account equality issues, has been at the centre of the council's response.
82. During the response, the council has been conscious that existing inequalities may deepen and that those with multiple impairments may face disproportionate challenges. The collaborative work with the voluntary and

community sector has helped to ensure communication of support to as many people as possible including those who already experience barriers to accessing information. More than ever, it has been necessary to support those who are particularly vulnerable such as those at increased risk of domestic abuse, rough sleepers, and the homeless. Support groups for people with protected characteristics have had to be suspended but where possible alternative contact methods have been used in order to continue providing support. Respecting people's independence and dignity has been a key consideration throughout our response and services have been careful to find solutions with people rather than doing things for them. These aspects will continue to be addressed via the council's recovery plan and accompanying equality impact assessment.

## **Consultation Planned or Undertaken**

83. Given the nature of an emergency there is little time for consultation. Rather, it is the time to act immediately and to put into operation well established emergency planning and business continuity arrangements. What has been a feature of the response is the collaboration that has taken place with different groups and agencies across the community seeking to achieve shared goals.
84. By working together and listening to each other's views we have been able to provide the right support, at the right time, and in the right way. This is evidenced by the tremendous feedback the council has received. This includes feedback from those who have received food parcels, those awarded grants to carry out invaluable community work, businesses who have been so thankful to receive financial support, and from those who simply needed a friendly voice at the end of a phone. This feedback has moved our staff and bolstered spirits throughout this difficult period. Some examples of the lovely feedback received was featured in the *Ashford For You* publication. Most recently, the Leader has received thanks from the Ashford Branch of the Kent Association of Local Councils to congratulate and appreciate the council's excellent response in the face of a crisis unprecedented in recent times.

## **Other Options Considered**

85. It is not possible within this report to document the many alternative course of action ACER and the BCIMT has considered throughout the COVID-19 response. Decisions have been made collaboratively, with constant reference to our COVID-19 risk assessment. This has enabled ACER and the BCIMT to address the various risks faced, discuss mitigation, and assign tasks to officers to implement control measures. The risk assessment has focused on the key strategic objectives of protecting the public, our staff, and businesses and preparing for longer-term recovery.

## **Next Steps in Process**

86. This report has focused on the response to the outbreak and identified the transitional arrangements which will operate while we move to a 'new normal'. There is no doubt that the expanded use of digital solutions will enable us to

provide services more efficiently and effectively to our residents, businesses, and communities. We can become more responsive to community needs and involve them even more in shaping services and guiding how our borough develops. The outbreak has brought us closer to our local charities, the voluntary sector and an army of people who want to support each other. The positive relationships and connections that have been formed between the council and the community will be nurtured moving forward.

87. We must be mindful of the possibility of further surges in infection rates. Therefore, many of the safeguards we have introduced, and the transitional arrangements, will need to continue. Some transitional services are already being successfully integrated into the council's normal services where the appropriate expertise lies.
88. Beyond the COVID-19 response phase, we look towards our long-term recovery. A recovery plan is being prepared and will be presented to Cabinet in July 2020. This will set out the actions to be taken over the next 18 months addressing the many challenges we face and capturing opportunities for our borough and the council as an organisation.

## **Conclusion**

89. It is difficult to capture the enormity of what has happened following the COVID-19 outbreak, but hopefully, this report demonstrates the strong leadership and engagement the council (both member and officers) are providing. An innovative response was needed to an what is an exceptional situation. Such a response was made possible due to the strong connections between the council, our community, and other public services alongside the voluntary and community sectors. It is these relationships that will support us to move forward and help us to thrive in our new world.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

90. The borough council has always had a close relationship with the voluntarily and charity sector. This partnership I believe has played a crucial role in our ability to react to this crisis. Throughout this pandemic I have been impressed and surprised at the capability of council officers and members to adapt to the ever-changing landscape and the challenges that the virus has raised. We have taken a dynamic approach to the way we normally operate to ensure we are looking after the most vulnerable in our society. The residents of the borough have also stepped up to help in a variety of ways which has been truly phenomenal and has help show a different side to our communities. Caring Ashford has always been at the forefront of how we operate as a council and this crisis has just reinforced those values.

*Cllr Peter Feacey, Portfolio Holder Community Safety and Wellbeing*

## **Contact and Email**

91. Sheila Davison – [sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:sheila.davison@ashford.gov.uk)

## **Appendix A - Service Update**

### **Finance and IT Team**

The IT department are returning to more of a business as usual focus following a period where they had to rapidly support the move to remote working. This included completing the migration to Office 365 to allow staff to access Teams, building capacity by increasing the number of external servers from two to six, and supporting the virtual committees. The emphasis has returned to a business as usual and delivering projects to increase our IT resilience and ability to continue remote working.

Revenues and Benefits are slowly returning to business as usual, after administering and distributing almost £26m in Business Grants and Council Tax allocations. There is an increase in Council Tax Reduction claims, however, this is currently being managed with the staff being redeployed where necessary.

While the accounts team would usually be closing the accounts at this time of year, they have instead been working on reviewing the current budget for the emerging pressures and are focused on the two-month budget monitoring position which will lead to the Medium-Term Financial Plan being prepared. The deadline for closing accounts has been extended to the end of August 2020 and work is now stepping up to complete this.

### **Legal Services**

Legal services has maintained its legal advice and support role across services and, despite the closure of physical courts and the need for social distancing in evidence gathering, has continued with high profile litigation especially around closure orders in collaboration with housing colleagues and the police.

The introduction and subsequent management of virtual meetings to which the public have remote access has been a significant project for both legal and member services. Virtual Planning Committee meetings have been a particular focus and challenge and the council was one of the very first in the country to have a full virtual planning meeting. The run of 2 weekly Planning Committee meetings since has required an increased focus on 106 agreements by legal services particularly to support the timely issue of planning permissions for major developments of importance to the economic recovery and prosperity of the borough. This has all been achieved with full time home working by most of the staff.

Electoral services continue to meet all statutory obligations and functions. The annual canvass beginning in late summer will present a particular challenge but new canvass procedures and extended timescales for completion of registers will assist efficiency and enable most processes to be done or managed remotely at the present time. Whether door-knocking remains a statutory requirement is still to be decided but in the unlikely event it is still required and it is undertaken, all proper safety precautions will be followed. Elections are currently suspended until May 2021 when fresh challenges around combined elections will arise with KCC, Police & Crime Commissioner and many parish by-elections potentially outstanding.

### **Environment and Land Management**

Waste collections have continued for all types of waste but we have reduced our bulk collections. Council staff and Biffa have worked hard to guarantee minimum disruption

to services and residents' support has been overwhelming positive. Recycling rates will be released soon. Cemetery provision has coped well and bookings for service have moved online, with unrestricted access to cemeteries. Dog warden and allotment services are operating normally with the exception that we are not allowing plots to change hands.

Aspire has done an incredible job in challenging circumstances. Staff have been flexible to ensure that we can continue to provide grounds maintenance services (albeit in a different delivery model) while redeploying staff to run the Ashford Response Depot. We have ensured parks and open spaces have remained open and well maintained.

### **HR and Customer Services**

Customer service calls are being answered more quickly. This is due to lower customer demand because as a consequence of the council temporarily suspending some services that drive calls through the contact centre. There has been no face-to-face service delivery due to the building closure so staff are dealing service request by phone and email. The HR team has worked remotely on business as usual issues as well as providing support to managers overseeing teams who are remote working.

### **Housing: day to day responsive repairs**

Focus has concentrated on essential repairs, safety, security and hygiene-related issues, being completed on an emergency basis. Other repairs have been undertaken on an ad-hoc demand basis for vulnerable or elderly tenants.

### **Housing: planned maintenance (PM) contract**

The PM programme has been largely suspended and is not expected to restart until August. The exception to the suspension of works has been service contracts that must be continued either for health and safety compliancy obligations, to avoid serious risk or to maintain essential services. These works include gas servicing, lifts, sewerage treatment, water hygiene, door entry systems and communal TV systems and essential works such as adaptations identified by occupational therapists as urgent.

We have suspended the electrical testing programme as these are five yearly tests and we will focus to get back on track as soon as restrictions are lifted. We will prioritise properties where this is an annual obligation to test and inspect electrical installations. Access into properties is the biggest issue and has been addressed by our contractors in accordance with best practice.

### **Housing: heating and maintenance emergency services**

Heating installations and boiler replacements have been suspended until August. Emergency boiler replacements can be actioned if necessary. Our new heating contractor, Swale Heating, has a comprehensive set of risk assessment & method statements (RAMS) for attending all calls and they have specially trained engineers with full PPE so they can attend an infected household if need be.

### **Housing: homelessness & rough sleeping**

Numbers in temporary accommodation have risen following the government's instruction to secure indoor shelter for all rough sleepers. The number of households in temporary accommodation has ranged from 147-151, and the number of applications has fallen to 126 monthly. Move-on accommodation is a concern but

efforts are being made to identify private sector, housing association and social housing stock.

### **Housing: choice-based lettings/social housing allocations**

The scheme has not been operational during the pandemic but there is a steady flow of new applications. There are opportunities for using some void properties to reduce the pressure on the numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation but there have been practical difficulties in doing so. Despite this, efforts are being made to safely work around this and enable some “move on” for households.

### **Housing: Social Lettings Agency**

There are no new properties being procured but there is still remote working taking place to maintain tenancies, cover mid-year reviews and inspections and deal with essential works when the need might arise. It is expected that activity will rise as we emerge into the recovery phase and the team are well positioned to meet this need.

### **Environmental Health**

While programmed food safety inspections are not being undertaken, advice is being given to businesses that remain open. The food safety EHOs are focused on supporting the new community/voluntary sector food services including our own Ashford Response Depot. Licence applications continue to be processed, planning applications reviewed for environmental impact and complaints investigated. Visits are undertaken in response to complaints that premises which should be closed are trading. This is being done with the police and trading standards. Extensions to licence renewal payments have been organised.

### **Community Safety**

Service provision is near normal. The Ashford Monitoring Centre has continued to function as normal with additional calls made to our Lifeline customers to give them reassurance. Some AMC staffing gaps have been filled by Civil Enforcement Officers who are Lifeline-trained. The CCTV monitoring service is also operating as normal. Our Resilience Team’s work continues, and they have been focused on supporting our COVID-19 response. The strategic and operational rotas have been in operation ensuring 24/7 cover is maintained for all the ‘normal’ council activity. Although the domestic abuse (DA) one stop shop has been closed, our DA co-ordinators have been referring people to relevant advice services and when necessary refuges. Regular work with community safety partners has taken place. The Community Safety Unit is operating virtually and there is daily contact with the police.

### **Parking**

Parking enforcement was temporarily halted. However, a staged return has been implemented in line with relaxing of lockdown. Civil Enforcement Officer, after a period of issuing warnings for parking contraventions are now back to full enforcement as of mid-June. Charges have continued to operate in our car parks but usage has been significantly hit. Work are almost complete to install ANPR at Elwick Place and the switch to the RingGo parking app has now taken place.

### **Planning**

Four successful virtual Planning Committee meetings have been held, with Ashford being one of the first councils in the UK to trial them. Newtown Works and Conningbrook were both approved. Currently undertaking a review of planning

performance in terms of numbers of applications, fee income and other key measures. Site visits were suspended but some externally socially distanced site visits are now commencing for Building Control and Planning, when it is necessary to assess the proposal, but the service can also progress planning applications by focusing on background work and use of other means where appropriate such as Google Earth. Land searches have remained high possibly because solicitors continue to progress paperwork relating to house sales.

## **Culture**

The team is working on project assessments and supporting the COVID-19 response. For the parks and greenspaces service areas there has been conflicting demands of making sure urban parks are open, providing opportunities for people to exercise, while supporting advice regarding social distancing. Play areas, MUGA's, cafes, toilets, sports pitches and skate parks remain closed. Car parks at country parks are currently closed which will be reviewed now that travel by car to open spaces has just been lifted. Parking to urban parks has remained open to support those less able, to access their local spaces.

The routes to parks and open spaces are important. There has been a big growth in pedestrians and cyclists. Improving sites and changing behaviours is contained within existing open space, walking and cycling strategies and the Cabinet will be considering the latter at its next meeting. Action plans will need to be reconsidered in light of finances, given loss of income but parks, open spaces and the paths and cycle ways should be a priority area to maintain the wellbeing of the community.

## **Corporate Property & Projects**

The over-arching asset management strategy has been drafted and there is a slight delay due to current situation. This is expected to go to the June Cabinet meeting and will inform our approach to our corporate property assets.

## **Property Building Service**

We're ensuring that compliance in our properties is being adequately managed for those we are responsible for. Further advice is being drafted to assist our tenants in their obligations where they are duty holder. Emergency reactive repairs are being undertaken on an as needs basis giving consideration to budgets.

**Agenda Item No:** 7  
**Report To:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020  
**Report Title:** Recovery Plan 2020  
**Report Author & Job Title:** Lorna Ford (Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications)  
Jennifer Shaw (Strategy and Policy Manager)  
**Portfolio Holder** Cllr. Clarkson  
**Portfolio Holder for:** Leader of the Council



**Summary:** This report presents the draft Recovery Plan 2020. The Plan sets out the council's approach to making a timely and successful recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic; the Plan reflects the difficult and challenging times ahead and the opportunities that are arising as we recover from the pandemic as an organisation and local leader. The Plan sets out how we can embrace the 'new normal' to build; a stronger local economy, increased community resilience and public participation and to encourage living more environmentally sustainable lifestyles, keeping our pledge to achieve carbon neutrality as a core focus of the Plan. Included is the long term ambition for the borough. Developed in consultation with a wide of range of stakeholders this ambition is the conduit for a consistent journey from recovery phase to implementing our key strategic documents in the near future. The Plan covers the next 18 months reflecting economic forecasting for the return of economic stability during the next two years. Given the many uncertainties faced at present on timing of easing of restrictions and as more is learnt about the pandemic and how to suppress further peaks in infection The Plan will need to be flexible and responsive. The Recovery Plan macro-economic forecast is based on the assumption of an orderly departure from the EU at the end of 2020. The actions set out are those that can be started within the next 9 months. The plan will be regularly reviewed and further actions brought forward at the time where they will assist with furthering recovery across the borough.

**Key Decision:** YES  
**Significantly Affected Wards:** All  
**Recommendations:** The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. **approve adoption of the Recovery Plan as the main strategic document of the council for the next 18 months;**
- II. **give delegated authority to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to vary the Delivery Plan programme, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Recovery Monitoring and Advisory Group, in order to expedite a timely response to changing circumstances to support the recovery of local residents, communities and business;**
- III. **authorise the CEO, in consultation with the Leader and the relevant Portfolio Holder to commence delivery of the Recovery Plan prior to its being recommended for adoption at Full Council in October;**
- IV. **note 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;**
- V. **note and agree the long-term ambition for the borough: and**
- VI. **note the Ashford Ambition Report (shaping a prosperous, sustainable & inclusive future for the Borough in 2030 & beyond) as the evidence base for the forthcoming Corporate Plan**

**Policy Overview:**

The government's Recovery Plan – Our Plan to Rebuild has guided the underlying principles of the Ashford Recovery Plan. The government plan sets out the steps it will take to keep people safe and reduce transmission of the coronavirus whilst easing restrictions to revitalise the economy and deliver a greener, more resilient future for everyone.

The Plan will be responsive to information, guidance and policy emerging from The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) as it assesses the impact of the coronavirus at a local level.

**Financial Implications:**

As a result of reduced income to the council while the stay at home restrictions were in force and the costs of responding to the coronavirus emergency the council has a budget deficit. The Recovery Plan is structured around supporting the council's financial position, economic recovery, carbon neutrality and community resilience over the next 18 months. The proposed actions are prioritised as they will contribute to balancing the MTFP through increasing efficiencies, income generation and / or commercialisation or are cost neutral or

have external funding sources and are meeting the assessment criteria set out in the Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan is funded by a combination of funds redirected from the NNDR (National Non-Domestic Rates) pool and delivery plan reserves (formerly project reserves). The Business Rate Pool funding (Economic Growth) has been reallocated from the town centre framework projects to the focus on the economic recovery priorities within the Recovery Plan delivery. The Pool funding was originally approved for town centre framework projects which was agreed in 2019.

**Legal Implications:**

**Equalities Impact Assessment:**

See Attached. No negative impacts were identified.

**Data Protection Impact Assessment:**

Where necessary individual actions will be assessed for any data protection implications, such as remote working.

**Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):**

Potential risks arising as a result of the coronavirus pandemic have been assessed. The Recovery Plan mitigates those risks, which have been included on the corporate risk register.

A second wave of the coronavirus could result in funds being diverted away from delivering the Recovery Plan to deal with an emergency response that maybe required depending on the severity of any subsequent outbreak.

**Sustainability Implications:**

The Recovery Plan has a **positive** impact on the council's commitment to achieving Carbon Neutrality by 2030. This remains an overriding commitment of the council and permeates through all four themes of the Recovery Plan. The proposed actions are considered in respect of their contribution to carbon reduction, promoting a green economy and encouraging; a cleaner, healthier and more sustainable way of living. This will set in place good foundations as the council moves out of the recovery phase and takes forward the Corporate Plan priority to be a 'Green Pioneer' and adopt the Carbon Neutral Strategy.

For example, actions that will contribute to achieving carbon neutrality include:

- Remote working for staff – reduces commuting by car, to offices and for meetings.
- Reviewing councils own assets – will include buildings, energy efficiency, water consumption etc.
- Increasing options for walking and cycling for work and leisure, reduced car dependency.
- Progressing with digital transformation to increase use of

virtual meetings and information sharing, both internally and with the wider public.

- Increasing local energy generation through renewable energy sources.
- Increasing biodiversity and provision of open space through improvements in our parks.
- Run promotional campaigns for staff and public to increase knowledge and share ideas for more sustainable lifestyles.
- Encourage businesses to develop and use green processes and actively encourage green industries to establish in the borough.

**Other Material Implications:**

None

**Exempt from Publication:**

**NO**

**Background Papers:**

UK Government Recovery Plan – Our Plan to Rebuild  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/884760/Our\\_plan\\_to\\_rebuild\\_The\\_UK\\_Government\\_s\\_COVID-19\\_recovery\\_strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf)

Ashford Ambition Report July 2020 (available on request from the authors)

Ashford Residents Survey 2020 Report (available on request from the authors)

**Contact:**

[lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk) – Tel: 01233 330413 / 07740 748043  
[jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk) – Tel: (01233 330451 / 07876 392484)

## Report Title: Recovery Plan 2020

### Introduction and Background

1. The Recovery Plan 2020 (Appendix 1) has been developed to put in place a framework to enable a timely and structured recovery from the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The plan sets out to deliver a number of actions that will allow the council to re-configure how it works and can most effectively deliver services to residents and how, in collaboration with others, help mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on the local economy, communities and residents. The underlying principles are to build back to a greener, more prosperous, resilient and caring borough. The 'Principles for a Green Recovery' set out by the Kent Resilience Forum will be used as a guide to inform decision making. (An explanation of the principles for a green recovery are in appendix F of the Recovery Plan).
2. To inform the next Corporate Plan, consultants had been commissioned to undertake a study – 'Ashford Futures' (in consultation with members, staff and local stakeholders) to develop an aspirational ambition for the borough. This culminated in a report 'Ashford Ambition, shaping a prosperous, sustainable & inclusive future for the Borough in 2030 & beyond' and the ambition will be the guiding principle of key strategic documents, the Corporate Plan, the Economic Development Strategy, the Carbon Neutral Strategy and the Local Plan. As this work was drawing to a conclusion the coronavirus pandemic became prevalent in the UK and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March the government introduced 'lockdown' to save lives. The remaining consultation was carried out by online methods. The Executive Summary of the Ashford Ambition Report is at appendix H of the Recovery Plan)
3. The council's immediate priority turned to responding to the coronavirus pandemic; supporting communities, residents and business. This meant that the public consultation for the Corporate Plan, planned to take place during June and July, was suspended. As the implications of the lockdown became clearer; reduced income to the council, rapid introduction of different ways of working, the stalling of the economy and disruption and hardship to many local people it became evident that a Recovery Plan should developed to provide local leadership and direction to enable a timely recovery in what have and continue to be challenging and unprecedented circumstances.
4. The Leader has steered the development of the Recovery Plan, assisted by the Recovery Group of senior officers (Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Economy, Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications, Head of Environment and Land Management, Head of HR and Customer Services, Head of Finance and IT). It is recognised that the Recovery Plan will need to be responsive to potentially yet unknown consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and further guidance from the government as restrictions are eased and possibly re-imposed should infection rates increase. A Recovery Monitoring and Advisory Group,

nominated by The Leader will be formed, as a committee of the Cabinet, to oversee the delivery of the Recovery Plan.

5. Included within the Recovery Plan are;
- the revised Equalities Objectives and
  - the Service Design Principles

Equalities Objectives.

The Equalities Objectives were due to be reviewed concurrently with the Corporate Plan, in accordance with the legal requirement for public authorities to set at least one equality objective every four years to help focus attention on priority equality issues.

With the introduction of a new Corporate Plan paused to take stock of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, this Recovery Plan has been developed and our equalities objectives reviewed in light of the current circumstances. They will be kept under constant review and adapted accordingly.

Objective 1: Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do

Objective 2: Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities

Objective 3: Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents

Objective 4: Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

The full equalities objectives are included in appendix D of the Recovery Plan

Service Design Principles

Service Design Principles are a set of considerations that form the basis of any good product/service. They provide a framework within which to operate, a structure made up of rules, guidelines and considerations that need to be considered when creating services/processes. They are fundamental pieces of advice that should make creating any new service/process easier as they give parameters that pre-empt tough questions and decisions.

The design principles have been developed in consultation with staff through a presentation and a series of workshops and are:

- Do the hard work, test and learn to keep it simple
- Focus on the customer journey, making it quick and uncomplicated to empower customers to do more for themselves
- Focus on the goals and delivery
- Less is more
- Distinctive
- Seamless approach
- Who needs this information?
- Tell customers what to expect and keep them up to date along the way
- This is for everyone

The full design principles are found in appendix E of the Recovery Plan.

## **Proposal**

Members are requested to:

6. Approve adoption of the Recovery Plan as the main strategic document of the council for the next 18 months.
7. To give delegated authority to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to vary the Delivery Plan programme, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and the Recovery Monitoring and Advisory Group, in order to expedite a timely response to changing circumstances to support the recovery of local residents, communities and business.
8. Authorise the CEO, in consultation with the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder to commence delivery of the Recovery Plan prior to its being recommended for adoption at Full Council in October;
9. Note 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;
10. Note and agree the long-term ambition for the borough:  
  
*The Ashford Ambition: to be a thriving, productive and inclusive Borough in 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.*
11. Note the Ashford Ambition report as the evidence base for the forthcoming Corporate Plan.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

12. Members are referred to the attached Assessment at Appendix 2. There are no negative impacts identified as arising from the implementation of the Recovery Plan

## **Consultation Planned or Undertaken**

13. The Recovery Plan has been developed by The Leader and Management Team Recovery Group. The Cabinet was consulted on the draft Recovery Plan at Call Over on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020.
14. There has been extensive consultation with members, staff and local stakeholders to develop the long term ambition for the borough as part of the Ashford Futures study. In addition the Ashford Residents Survey asked questions relating to priorities for the Corporate Plan and achieving Carbon Neutrality. These have been taken into consideration in the development of

the Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan is an intermediate step in the journey towards adopting the next Corporate Plan, The Economic Development Strategy and the Carbon Neutral Strategy. With stakeholders and residents views already gathered at its core, the Recovery Plan can be adopted without further delay. A summary of the consultation is in Appendix B of the Recovery Plan.

## **Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended**

15. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted on a number of areas of council business, our communities and local economy. It is important that a clear plan is in place to guide the council's strategic decision making as we recover from the pandemic and are able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances as and when they arise in the near future.
16. Delivering the actions in the Recovery Plan will enable the council to address challenges and take advantage of opportunities going forward over the next 18 months.
17. This provides a period in which to review the Corporate Plan, Economic Development Strategy and Carbon Neutral Strategy to ensure they are reflecting lessons learnt and focused on building back better for the longer term to achieve the ambition for Ashford borough in 2030 and beyond.

## **Next Steps in Process**

18. The CEO commences delivering the Recovery Plan. This will provide a short timeframe to understand any further constraints and opportunities and where the plan will need to be flexible and/or revised ahead of it being present to Full Council for adoption.
19. Further to approval at Full Council the Recovery Plan will be published on the council's website.

## **Conclusion**

20. The Recovery Plan provides a strong basis in which the council can move from an emergency response footing to instigating a well-planned recovery to the benefit of the council as an organisation, the local community and economy.
21. The Recovery Plan keeps at its core the commitment to achieve carbon neutrality, through the interventions and actions wherever possible, building back a more sustainable borough.
22. Comprehensive and regular review will ensure our recovery remains focused and on track to deliver a timely recovery that is inclusive and ensures those hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic are not disadvantaged.

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

23. This Plan represents an important step forward in ensuring the recovery of our communities and economy and prioritises what we must deliver to get there. In many ways we have already begun the journey to recovery.
24. As an organisation our working practices have had to change and indeed we are demonstrating better ways of working with added environmental benefits. There are opportunities we will take to embed longer term changes to the way we work whilst ensuring the quality of our services are maintained and delivered as efficiently as possible.
25. Throughout the coming months there will be many uncertainties facing us and regular review of this plan will be necessary in order to keep our Recovery Plan actively on track and responsive to changes be they global, national or local. In order to deliver this Recovery Plan for our borough of Ashford, it is important that we all work together to ensure that we return to prosperity and good health as speedily as possible.

## **Contact and Email**

26. Lorna Ford. Email: [lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:lorna.ford@ashford.gov.uk)
27. Jennifer Shaw. Email: [jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.shaw@ashford.gov.uk)

DRAFT

Ashford Borough Council

# Recovery Plan

July 2020



DRAFT

# Contents

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Foreword by Cllr Clarkson, Leader	p03
1. Introduction	p04
2. Government Policy	p05
3. Key Assumptions	p06
4. Challenges and Opportunities	p08
5. Taking a Longer-term View	p10
6. Our Recovery Plan	p11
7. Delivery, Monitoring and Review	p18
8. Appendices	p22



# Foreword by Cllr Clarkson, Leader



When we embarked on renewing our new 5 year Corporate Plan, due for introduction in 2020, we could never have envisaged that we would be in the throes of a global pandemic, with such tragic loss of life. As we are now hopefully coming through this crisis, we find ourselves in the position of having to adopt a Recovery Plan to steer us through the next 18 months. By early 2022 we should have recovered enough to be back on track to forge ahead with our longer term ambitions for Ashford, which are also outlined in this Plan.

During the pandemic I was extremely heartened by how our communities rallied round to help those who were vulnerable or in need. This period of enforced social distancing has also caused us to take a closer look at what is important to us; caring for each other and valuing what we have and what others do to support us in our daily lives. Our pledge to become carbon neutral remains a firm commitment. Whilst the coronavirus is a significant setback to our economic and social

journey we must look ahead to how we can work together to build a brighter, greener more sustainable future for the borough now and for the generations to come.

As an organisation our working practices had to change and indeed have worked extremely well and provided environmental benefits. There are opportunities we will take to embed longer term changes to the way we work whilst ensuring the quality of our services are maintained and delivered as efficiently as possible.

Throughout the coming months there will be many uncertainties facing us and regular review will be necessary in order to keep our Recovery Plan actively on track and responsive to changes be they global, national or local. In order to deliver this Recovery Plan for our borough of Ashford, it is important that we all work together to ensure that we return to prosperity and good health as speedily as possible.



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# 1. Introduction

We find ourselves in an unprecedented position. There will be consequences of the coronavirus pandemic that will influence our lives now and in the years to come. This Recovery Plan sets out the action we will take over the next 18 months to address the challenges and grasp the opportunities whether they are economic, social or environmental.

There will be opportunities to be gained by working collectively across all sectors, statutory and voluntary.

We shall continue to support and collaborate with the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF). This will ensure we are acting consistently with the county wide approach, able to draw on experiences of others and deliver coordinated and consistent recovery messages to the public and business. We will actively engage with the KRF Recovery Advisory Group, which will provide us with increased knowledge, information and support, which will inform the decision making in each of the districts.

The voluntary organisations in the borough have been outstanding in their response and the joint working established must be continued to ensure all residents have access to support and advice for their physical, mental and financial wellbeing. We will need to be aware that some communities have suffered particular loss and hardship and may need additional, longer term support to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

There has been wide acknowledgment that the restrictions introduced to minimise transmission of the coronavirus have significantly reduced climate change emissions. There is now a global discussion about how this could become mainstream; supporting the green economy through helping business to transition away from carbon intensive activities, assisting individuals to work differently and smarter, utilising technology, less commuting and increasing active travel options which prioritise pedestrians and cyclists. The UK Climate Secretary said in April 2020 'the world must work together, as

it has to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, to support a green and resilient recovery, which leaves no one behind.' In this Recovery Plan our actions are carefully considered to ensure wherever possible they are contributing to carbon reduction by taking opportunities to introduce new ways of working and supporting changes to enable a more sustainable way of living. We will, wherever possible, use the Kent Resilience Forum 'principles for a green recovery' as a framework against which all our actions are considered in order to assist in prioritising those which have positive environmental outcomes.

As the restrictions are gradually eased we will need to be responsive and ready to advise, where necessary, how this can be effected safely such as the reopening of town and village centres, play areas and making space for cycling and walking.

This Recovery Plan will culminate in the knowledge that we have seized opportunities and addressed the challenges thrust upon us by the pandemic to build a better future.





## 2. Government Policy

From midnight on the 23rd March 2020 the government required as many people as possible to stay at home wherever possible and to only make essential journeys. All non-essential businesses and workplaces were required to close, in addition to the earlier closure of schools and the leisure and hospitality sectors. Social distancing was introduced for everyone and, for the most vulnerable to infection, a shielding programme was activated. These 'lockdown' measures were put in place until it was determined that the reproduction rate of the virus had fallen to a level to suppress the virus, save lives and protect the NHS.

At the beginning of May the reproduction rate had fallen, meaning the number of infected people is falling. On the 10th May the Prime Minister announced a slight easing of lockdown restrictions. The following day the government issued its COVID-19 recovery strategy – Our Plan to Rebuild. This plan recognises that there will not be a quick return or any easy answers and it will be necessary to adapt as more is learnt

about the virus. The long term solution lies with finding a vaccine or drug treatment to the virus but the time scale for this is unknown and it is possible that a vaccine will not be found. Therefore the government's overriding priority remains to save lives and to do that it must be acknowledged that life will be different for the foreseeable future. The easing of restrictions will take place in steps, determined by the reproduction rate of the virus and 4 other tests.

The government is acutely aware of the impact on the economy of lockdown and the devastation it is causing to some businesses and livelihoods, health and wellbeing.

The government refers to the impact of the virus on the global economy and that it is not expecting the world to return to normal. The UK must adapt and shape the new world to improve living standards across the nation and strive to deliver a UK and world economy which is stronger, cleaner, more sustainable and more resilient after this crisis.

The Government COVID-19 Recovery Strategy can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>

A summary can be found in Appendix A.



# 3. Key Assumptions

## 3.1 Macro-Economic Position

The economic forecasts used to help set a baseline for our new Corporate Plan have been revised to reflect the potential impact to the UK economy and the rate of economic recovery which will be dependent in part on the easing of restrictions.

Our consultants, Experian, have shared analysis of four possible scenarios in terms of macro-economic recovery. It is understood that the UK government is basing its recovery plans on what is known as the 'delayed-V' scenario which assumes:

- COVID-19 successfully contained in Q3 of 2020.
- Suppression measures begin to unwind in September.
- Activity remains at very subdued levels for most of 2020 Q3.
- Government mitigation policies have a fair amount of success.
- A tightening in credit conditions proves mild and short lived, while Sterling stabilises.

This scenario also assumes that the UK exits the single market and customs union in an orderly way at the end of 2020 with a Free Trade Agreement coming into effect in early 2021.

## 3.2 ABC Financial Position

Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, the council's Medium Term Financial Plan highlighted the risks and difficulties that the council was facing in terms of increasing demand for services and proposed reviews of funding mechanisms. However; the council was in a strong financial position and this will need to be deployed differently to support the council through the crisis and into recovery period. There are significant budgetary pressures that, despite government's allocation of nearly £1.4m in additional funding, will need careful management and the use of reserves to cover the gap.

As a result of the crisis the council's income from services has reduced and it has incurred expenditure to support the emergency response which has drawn on reserves.

Income will be severely reduced in the 3 months from April, as the stay at home, stay safe message prevails. Then, as lockdown is eased income will slowly increase. It is anticipated that income levels may not return to normal until the end of 2020, or indeed into 2021, as confidence grows and restrictions are lifted in a phased programme, determined nationally. Some income streams may take longer to recover due to uncertainty in the global economic outlook.

The 2020/21 budget will see a significant financial pressure. Government funding of £1.36m will cover the direct pressure on the budget in responding to the coronavirus but will only partly offset lost revenue. Any further government funding to local authorities will be a welcome contribution towards easing the pressure on our budgets.

There will be ongoing review of budgets over the coming months and the forecast will be refined to identify where efficiencies can be made, savings, our borrowing strategy and economic forecasting.

As part of the recovery the council will need to rise to the challenge of supporting the local community and economy after the crisis, the council will need to restore its financial strength and transform itself to enable it to deliver services in an appropriate way for the future. This will mean that further emphasis will need to be placed on developing further commercial initiatives and identifying efficiencies from the council's operations.

## 3.3 Local Economy

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant effect on the world-wide economy. It is recognised that there will be a period of recession, how long and how deep this is will be dependent on many factors, global, national and local.



The UK government has put in place a number of measures to help reduce the impact on business and to safeguard employment, however it is expected that there will be significant economic difficulties in the short and longer term.

Unemployment is predicted, by the ONS, to rise from around 4% in February 2020 to nearly 9% under lockdown. Three of the sectors that are expected to see a particularly negative impact from the coronavirus outbreak are the arts and entertainment, accommodation and catering, and much of the retail and wholesale sectors. These sectors represent approx. 30% of Ashford's employment and would therefore have a big impact on local unemployment and associated deprivation levels and consumer spending.

Finding alternative employment will be difficult as vacancies have dropped as businesses delay hiring people until they know the full scale of the impact to their business. The government's Furlough scheme is being taken up by many businesses, but many small and medium businesses will likely be forced to lay off high numbers of staff in order to address their cash flow problems.

Business growth is likely to be curtailed and some businesses will consider how they operate, which may lead to increased productivity in the longer term but could adversely affect employment opportunities as businesses streamline their activity and find alternative ways of making or selling products or services. In Ashford manufacturing accounts for approximately 5,000 jobs many of which will be affected as businesses close or reshape the operation to allow for more automation.

Business start-ups and survival will both be negatively affected. For start-ups it can be expected that the rate will decrease considering the uncertainty of the business landscape and the reduced amount of disposable income many households will have, together with a reluctance by investors to support higher risk businesses.

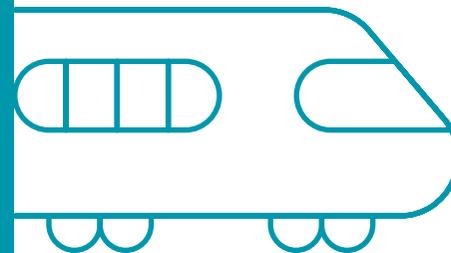
# 4. Challenges & Opportunities

In our work to develop our next Corporate Plan, a number of challenges and opportunities were identified. Some of these have been heightened by the coronavirus pandemic, others will emerge as we recover. Over the next 18 months our endeavours will be focused on responding to the challenges we face and how everyone who lives and works in the borough can benefit from any opportunities that arise.



## Impacts on the Council

Challenges	Opportunities
Additional demand - Benefits / Debt Recovery / Homelessness / Environmental Health	Capturing changes to working practices as a result of remote working
Office accommodation (social distancing)	More staff able to homework, reduces travel and carbon emissions
Participation in meetings – actual and virtual	Virtual meetings, reduces travel and can increase public participation
Face to face customer contact and third party visits	To review Organisational Structure to dovetail in with new working practices
Loss of revenue	Digitalisation of services – more access for customers through online methods
	Introduce new Commercial Delivery Hub to assist with income and improve commercial acumen
	Develop a robust commercial approach to generate income



# Impacts on the Economy

Challenges	Opportunities
Business survival	Encourage local businesses to adapt and re-establish themselves
Unemployment	Relocation of Government and business from London as they review costs and ways of working
Skills and knowledge	Capitalise on creating the green recovery
Consumer confidence (spending)	
Changes in consumer purchasing (move to online)	
Reduction in visitors to the borough	
Stalling of housebuilding and other infrastructure projects	



# Impacts on the Community

Challenges	Opportunities
Voluntary and charitable organisations funding decreasing	Resilience enhanced for communities and voluntary and charitable organisations
Less affluent neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected	Greater recognition of the established Ashford Volunteer Centre to assist ABC in delivering the Recovery Plan outcomes
Unemployment	Empowering communities to help themselves where possible
More people evicted from their homes	Increased clarity of community strengths and needs
Mental health and wellbeing issues	Greater collaborative work across sectors/organisations
	Improved wellbeing
	Enhance community safety and thus confidence
	Realign services where possible to support vulnerable groups, using our data to assist those most in need

# 5. Taking a Longer-term View

This Recovery Plan focuses on the next 18 months setting out what we can do to revitalise our local communities and local economy. Throughout this time it will be important to keep in mind the long term aspirations for the borough developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

This has also been informed by the most recent residents' survey findings carried out in February 2020. (Summary of consultation findings at Appendix B).

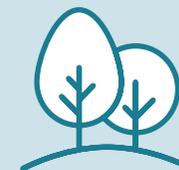
The priority actions included in this Recovery Plan are all contributing to achieving the overall long-term ambition for the borough.

*The Ashford Ambition: to be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough in 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.*



**This ambition is supported by three themes:**

**1. Green Pioneer** – Where businesses, communities and the public and third sector have come together to become carbon neutral, respect the local environment and ecology, and embrace a more sustainable way of living.



**2. Caring Ashford** – A caring and supportive place to live, with rich heritage; thriving towns, villages and rural communities; great schools; high-quality housing; a plethora of cultural activities and events; and a strong sense of civic pride.



**3. Targeted Growth** – A place where productive, innovative, responsible town and rural business communities offer good quality work to an agile and skilled local workforce who have embraced a culture of lifelong learning.



The following section sets out what we will do over the next 18 months to make a timely recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. Supporting everyone through the recovery phase to strengthen the resilience of our communities and economy, taking the path to achieving our long term ambitions.

# 6. Our Recovery Plan

**This plan has four themes each with a set of priority actions:**

- Economic Recovery
- Community Recovery
- Place Making, Regeneration, and Infrastructure
- Organisational Change and Workforce Development

**Each action has been assessed to make sure it meets at least one of the following criteria:**

- Carbon reduction
- Building community resilience
- Improved customer experience
- Balancing our MTFP
- Income generation / Commercialisation

**And how they contribute to achieving the three themes of the longer term aspiration for the borough as outlined in the section above.**

- Green Pioneer
- Caring Ashford
- Targeted Growth



We continue to provide our 'day to day' services to support residents and business and the delivery of our strategic sites to attract inward investment for job creation and homes. Below we set out our actions that will be the priority to progress and deliver over the next 9 months. These will be constantly reviewed.

The Delivery Plan will be dynamic, responsive to change and regularly updated to bring in new actions to support recovery over the next 18 months, as we learn more about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our economy, communities and residents. The Delivery Plan will be monitored against milestones and measures to track the progress of how we are meeting each of our priority actions.



## 6.1 Economic Recovery

This Recovery Plan will need to balance resources available to support existing businesses and safeguard jobs that have suffered due to the coronavirus pandemic, alongside stimulating economic growth to create employment and increase productivity.

Priority Action	Benefits
Provide advice and support to existing businesses including specialist support	Safe reopening of local business. Revitalising the economy of local centres. Protecting jobs. Increased opportunities for independent local traders
Continue the programme to attract business	Revitalising the town centres of Ashford and Tenterden with a diverse and attractive offer to consumers
Enable the delivery of Newtown Works	Delivery of prestigious scheme with opportunities for new business growth and employment
Continue to engage with the largest local employers	Increased business resilience and supply chains
Work with Ashford college to ensure local skills needs are met	Skilled local workforce able to take up local employment offers in existing and new creative sector business attracted to the borough
Utilise any government funding to implement and promote new employment	Increased access to jobs market, particularly for young people and the unemployed
Support the Tourism industry to rebuild and adapt the tourism offer as recovery progresses	More resilient and sustainable tourist industry attracting increased visitors numbers and spend to the area
Encourage businesses to develop and use green processes and actively encourage green industries to establish in the borough	Contribute to reducing the borough's carbon footprint and achieving the aim of carbon neutrality. Increasing skills and employment opportunities

The following indicators will be used to monitor our performance in delivering economic recovery.

Indicator	Frequency	Indicator	Frequency
Parking usage	Quarterly	% of business survival of those who have received support during the pandemic	Annual
Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	Quarterly		

We will also monitor the following indicators to help assess the wider impacts on our economic recovery using information from external sources.

Indicator	Frequency	Indicator	Frequency
Business survival rates	Annual	Unemployment 18 – 24 yr. olds	Quarterly
Unemployment	Quarterly		



## 6.2 Community Recovery

The response of local communities, during the pandemic, to support and help others has been truly outstanding. Sharing information and working collaboratively, over the coming months, will be critical to forging stronger more cohesive communities that are enabled to protect and promote their own wellbeing. We will work with the statutory providers and assist the voluntary sector, to support the most vulnerable in our borough through the recovery phase, particularly those most adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Priority Action	Benefits
Maintain and strengthen the community and voluntary sector	The community spirit seen during the coronavirus pandemic is continued longer term. Volunteering opportunities are established and valued
Involve and enable individuals and communities to take an active part in civic society and local decision making	Residents actively engage in local democracy so decision making process is well informed by local knowledge. Communities share ideas and learn from each other increasing their resilience
Undertake a community engagement programme, funded by the Kent Violence Reduction Unit. Pilot programme to begin in Bockhanger and Beaver and, if successful, rolled out to other ward areas	Inequalities are reduced through communities identifying issues and taking action to improve and promote community wellbeing, safety and cohesion
Delivery of community safety recovery actions with partners, including the expanded KCC Community Warden service	Borough wide provision for victims of domestic abuse Safer communities with less anti-social behaviour
Work closely with our health colleagues including support for the One You Shop	Reducing health inequalities through residents leading healthier lifestyles
Enabling those adversely impacted by COVID-19 to access the help they need	Reduce the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic



The following indicators will be used to monitor our performance in delivering community recovery.

Indicator	Frequency	Indicator	Frequency
Rent arrears/loss(HRA)	Quarterly	Lifeline answer speed	Quarterly
Homelessness presentations	Quarterly	Average time taken to process a benefit change of circumstance in no. days	Quarterly
Homelessness prevented	Quarterly	Average time taken to process a new benefit payment claim in no. days	Quarterly
No. of complaints regarding poor conditions in the private rented sector	Quarterly	Universal credit new claims	Quarterly
% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	Quarterly	Welfare intervention number of new cases	Quarterly
No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	Quarterly	Number of community voluntary groups grant funded by ABC	Annual
Number of volunteering hours for grant funded organisations	Quarterly	Website visits to COVID-19 pages	Quarterly
Food hygiene rating	Quarterly	Number of referrals to voluntary sector	Quarterly

We will also monitor the following indicators to help assess the wider impacts on our community recovery using information from external sources.

Indicator	Frequency
Number of positive COVID-19 cases	Quarterly

## 6.3 Place Making, Regeneration and Infrastructure

The council has a strong track record of delivering a wide range of projects, many in collaboration with partners, which have brought prosperity, events and heritage to the fore in the borough. As we adapt to the challenges post coronavirus, this Recovery Plan prioritises projects over the next 18 months that will make a significant contribution to creating sustainable places to live and work.

Priority Action	Benefits
Maintain appropriate housing delivery through our place making agenda	Economic recovery is supported by housing delivery. Improved health and wellbeing through good quality homes, suitable for the household's needs, and local facilities contribute to building sustainable communities. Our 5 year land supply is maintained
Continue our programme of affordable housing delivery - phases 5 and 6 HRA (and enabling work with our housing association partners)	Reduces number of households living in unsuitable accommodation, benefitting their health and wellbeing
Progress the temporary accommodation project at Henwood	Reduction in homelessness Savings made to general fund in reducing use of costly accommodation such as B&B
Complete the leisure procurement exercise	A range of affordable leisure and sports opportunities that encourage good health and wellbeing
Implement the Cycling and Walking Strategy and local cycling and walking infrastructure plan	Increased opportunities for exercise through walking and cycling, improved air quality as car dependency reduces. Lowering the borough's carbon emissions
Improve broadband coverage and reliability	Growth in online communication, working practices and business expansion, leading to job creation and reduction in carbon emissions through less travel
Increase clean energy generation through local renewable energy	Increased locally generated clean energy that, generate income to the council and reduces the borough's carbon footprint
Town centre reset	A clear direction of use of the town centre to create a vibrant local place to live, work and visit
Increase and improve public open space at Discovery Park, Victoria Park and Conningbrook Park	Well maintained, accessible, outdoor space improves individual health and wellbeing and provides space for communities to come together. Local biodiversity is protected and enhanced
Carry out preparatory work for forward plan for next waste collection service	Residents continue to receive high quality waste collection services and recycling protects the environment and reduces the use of valuable resources



The following indicators will be used to monitor our performance in delivering place making, regeneration and infrastructure.

Indicator	Frequency	Indicator	Frequency
No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	Quarterly	Number of live planning cases (reducing backlog)	Quarterly
No. of additional on-street purchase affordable homes delivered by council housing	Quarterly	% of working population cycling to work	Annual
% of planning applications approved	Quarterly	Number of organisations committed to travel plans	Annual
% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	Quarterly	Recycling rate	Quarterly
% of minor and other planning applications determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	Quarterly	Refuse collection rate	Quarterly
% of major planning application decisions overturned at appeal	Quarterly	Number of new garden waste users	Annual



## 6.4 Organisational Change and Workforce Development

The coronavirus pandemic has thrust upon many organisations a need to work differently. We must consider where it can be of continued benefit for our staff and customers to establish different approaches to how we work. Our income streams have been reduced and we must be innovative in how we adapt to a challenging financial outlook to maintain quality service delivery.

We will seek to improve our customers' experience of accessing services and participating in the democratic process whilst ensuring no-one is excluded. Our core values remain as; ambitious, creative and trustworthy. We will be guided by our service design principles and our equalities objectives.

We will embed across the organisation the council's aspiration to become a carbon neutral borough and use the Kent Resilience Forum 'principles for a green recovery' to ensure our decision making puts environmental sustainability that is well informed and thoughtful at its core.

### Our Equalities Objectives:

These are refreshed every four years to ensure the council has due regard to; eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

#### Objective 1

Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do

#### Objective 2

Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities

#### Objective 3

Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents

#### Objective 4

Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

The full explanation of our Equalities Objectives can be found at **Appendix D**.

### Our Service Design Principles:

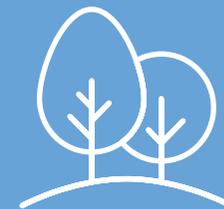
These will help guide teams to make appropriate decisions that are consistent across the entire council when designing services.

- Do the hard work, test and learn to keep it simple
- Focus on the customer journey, making it quick and uncomplicated to empower customers to do more for themselves
- Focus on the goals and delivery
- Less is more
- Distinctive
- Seamless approach
- Who needs this information?
- Tell customers what to expect and keep them up to date along the way
- This is for everyone

The full explanation of our Design Principles can be found in **Appendix E**.

## Principles for a Green Recovery:

- All investment to support recovery and future growth should have low or zero carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and aim for environmental net gain
- Employees and residents are supported to protect and enhance their wellbeing through a cleaner environment and more access to rich and varied nature
- Communities are well connected both digitally, and through an effective network of footpaths, cycle way's and public transport
- Future development and existing communities are resilient and adapted to the changing climate and severe weather events
- Biodiversity is protected, restored and created; nature-based solutions are considered first and invested in at every opportunity
- Ensure any green recovery solutions are equitable and fair; a green and equitable recovery go hand in hand
- Greater partnership working and collaboration



A full explanation of the principles is found in **appendix F**

Priority Action	Benefits
Balance the MTFP through sound financial management and generate long term income through secure investment opportunities	Restoring a strong financial position Maintaining a low council tax for residents
Enable remote working for staff to continue where it is safe and productive to do so	Adherence to social distancing guidance Flexible working to retain and attract a diverse workforce Reductions in carbon emissions from commuting by car
Review council owned assets	Efficient use of council assets contributes to income generation and savings targets
Continue the digital transformation programme to increase access to services and public participation	Council decisions are better informed by residents views and opinions Customers confidently access online services to find information and complete transactions
Develop and run an environmental awareness raising campaign for staff to increase knowledge and understanding and instigate behaviour change	Staff become ambassadors for achieving carbon neutrality Reducing carbon emissions is a priority in all work and service level decision making
Deliver the council's commercial strategy to strengthen the council's commercial approach through generating income and improving the efficiency of services	Services are maintained and improved

The following indicators will be used to monitor our performance in delivering organisational change and workforce development.

Indicator	Frequency	Indicator	Frequency
Lifeline – number of new users	Quarterly	Income target % achieved	Quarterly
Contribution to budget from commercial investments (%)	Annual	Number of days sickness per full time equivalent – long and short term sickness	Annual
% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council	Quarterly	Litigation - % of cases on which formal proceedings are issued	Quarterly
% of council tax collected by the council	Quarterly	% of s106 completed within agreed timeframe	Quarterly
Savings target % achieved	Annual		

# 7. Delivery, Monitoring and Review



This Recovery Plan together with the Delivery Plan will be regularly monitored and reviewed in the light of any changing circumstances. This will ensure the intended outcomes are being delivered and we can adapt to any changes rapidly. There are many external factors, some unknown to us at this time, which will influence this plan over the next 18 months.

A Recovery Monitoring & Advisory Board will be created, chaired by the Deputy Leader this will be a committee of the Cabinet. The Leader of the Labour Party will be invited to attend as a contributing observer, without voting rights.

## Delivery

The Management Team (MT), under the direction of the CEO, will have overall responsibility for the effective delivery of the Recovery Delivery Plan, which will in turn ensure delivery of the approved Recovery Plan on behalf of the council.

Heads of Service will liaise closely with and update their respective Portfolio Holders and feedback progress on delivery to MT, who under the direction of the CEO, will handle any day to day issues that arise. Any significant concerns or proposed changes to the approved Delivery Plan must be reported to the Leader, who will liaise with the CEO and Chair of the Recovery Monitoring & Advisory Board. The Leader in consultation with the CEO and Chair of the Board will decide on any appropriate action, which will in turn be reported to Cabinet and Council.

## Monitoring

The Cabinet, will be responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Recovery Plan and for authorising any significant policy or practical changes, which will be reported to Full Council. The Recovery Monitoring & Advisory Board will meet bimonthly to receive a progress report from the Management Team under the direction of the CEO. The Board will report to Cabinet every quarter. In terms of any urgent decisions needed the Chair of the Board will consult with the Leader of the Council who in turn will liaise with the CEO and decide on any appropriate action, which will be reported to the Cabinet and Council.

## Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive quarterly reports on progress and will be invited to scrutinise, comment and recommend as appropriate. In addition, the Leader will at his regular monthly meeting with Opposition Group Leaders, give an update on the current situation regarding Recovery.



# Our Recovery Plan 2020 - 22

The Ashford Ambition: to be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough in 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.

## Recovery Plan Themes



Economic Recovery



Community Recovery



Place Making, Regeneration, and Infrastructure



Organisational Change and Workforce Development

## Our Objectives

**Carbon reduction; Job creation; Building community resilience; Improving the customer journey; Revitalising the local economy; Promoting health and wellbeing; Tackling inequalities**

## Our Service Design Principles

This is a framework that guides us when designing services to ensure our services are;

- Efficient • Consistent • Inclusive
- Improve the customer experience

## Green principles



- 1 All investment to support recovery and future growth should have low or zero carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and aim for environmental net gain.
- 2 Employees and residents are supported to protect and enhance their wellbeing through a cleaner environment and more access to rich and varied nature.
- 3 Communities are well connected both digitally, and through an effective network of footpaths, cycleways and public transport.
- 4 Future development and existing communities are resilient and adapted to the changing climate and severe weather events
- 5 Biodiversity is protected, restored and created; nature-based solutions are considered first and invested in at every opportunity.
- 6 Ensure any green recovery solutions are equitable and fair; a green and equitable recovery go hand in hand.
- 7 Greater partnership working and collaboration.



## Equalities Objectives

These are refreshed every four years to ensure the council has due regard to; eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations



Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do



Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities



Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents



Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

# 8. Appendices

## Appendix A – Summary of the UK Government Recovery Strategy – Our Plan to Rebuild, May 2020.

From midnight on the 23rd March 2020 the government required as many people as possible to stay at home wherever possible and to only make essential journeys. All non-essential businesses and workplaces were required to close, in addition to the earlier closure of schools and the leisure and hospitality sectors. Social distancing was introduced for everyone and, for the most vulnerable to infection, a shielding programme was activated. These 'lockdown' measures were put in place until it was determined that the reproduction rate (the R value) had fallen to a level to suppress the virus, save lives and protect the NHS.

At the beginning of May the R value had fallen to below 1 meaning the number of infected people is falling. On the 10th May the Prime Minister announced a slight easing of lockdown restrictions. The following day the government issued its COVID-19 recovery strategy – Our Plan to Rebuild. This plan recognises that there will not be a quick return or any easy answers and it will be necessary to adapt as more is learnt about the virus. The long term solution lies with finding a vaccine or drug treatment to the virus but the time scale for this is unknown and it is possible that a vaccine will not be found. Therefore the government's overriding priority remains to save lives and to do that it must be acknowledged that life will be different for the foreseeable future. The government is acutely aware of the impact on the economy of lockdown and the devastation it is causing to some businesses and livelihoods, health and wellbeing.

'The longer the virus affects the economy, the greater the risks of long-term scarring and permanently lower economic activity, with business failures, persistently higher unemployment and lower earnings. This would damage the sustainability of the public finances and the ability to fund public services including the NHS. It would also likely lead to worse long-run physical and mental health outcomes, with a significant increase in the prevalence of chronic illness.'

The easing of restrictions will take place in steps. Each step being reviewed and should the R value start to increase then more stringent restrictions will be reinstated. Including the R value the government has 5 tests it will use to determine easing of lockdown measures.

The government reinstates that widespread compliance will be needed by everyone.

The easing of restrictions will enable a careful and planned return to work and limited social interaction and physical activity where social distancing can be observed or other measures to reduce transmission of the virus can be safely put in place. The government is enacting measures that have the largest effect on controlling the epidemic but the lowest health, economic and social costs, over the coming weeks and months. As more data and scientific evidence becomes available it may be that future restrictions are targeted more locally dependent on the risk in different locations.

They are increasing funding to promote and empower people to live healthier more active lives. Where there are public places those with responsibility for the spaces must be able to put in place appropriate measures for them to be used safely in accordance with the relevant COVID-19 secure guidance.

The government refers to the impact of the virus on the global economy and that it is not expecting the world to return to normal. The UK must adapt and shape the new world to improve living standards across the nation and strive to deliver a UK and world economy which is stronger, cleaner, more sustainable and more resilient after this crisis.



## COVID-19 vulnerable groups

(as defined in the Government strategy – Our Plan to Rebuild)

Group	Explanation	Current and continuing guidance	Government support
Clinically extremely vulnerable people (all people in this cohort will have received communication from the NHS)	People defined on medical grounds as clinically extremely vulnerable, meaning they are at the greatest risk of severe illness. This group includes solid organ transplant recipients, people receiving chemotherapy, renal dialysis patients and others.	Follow shielding guidance by staying at home at all times and avoiding all non-essential face-to-face contact. This guidance is in place until end June.	Support available from the National Shielding Programme, which includes food supplies (through food boxes and priority supermarket deliveries), pharmacy deliveries and care. Support is available via the NHS Volunteer Responders app.
Clinically vulnerable people	People considered to be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Clinically vulnerable people include the following: People aged 70 or older, people with liver disease, people with diabetes, pregnant women and others.	Stay at home as much as possible. If you do go out, take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household.	Range of support available while measures in place, including by local authorities and through voluntary and community groups. Support is available via the NHS Volunteer Responders app.
Vulnerable people (non-clinical)	There are a range of people who can be classified as 'vulnerable' due to non-clinical factors, such as children at risk of violence or with special education needs, victims of domestic abuse, rough sleepers and others.	People in this group will need to follow general guidance except where they are also clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable, where they should follow guidance as set out above.	For those who need it, a range of support and guidance across public services and the benefits system, including by central and local government and the voluntary and community sector.



## Appendix B - Consultation summary

### Ashford Futures Study and Ashford Borough Council Residents' Survey.

The Ashford Futures Study commenced in October 2019 with face to face interviews with the Leader of the council and the Chief Executive. This was followed by workshops with Cabinet Members and the Management Team.

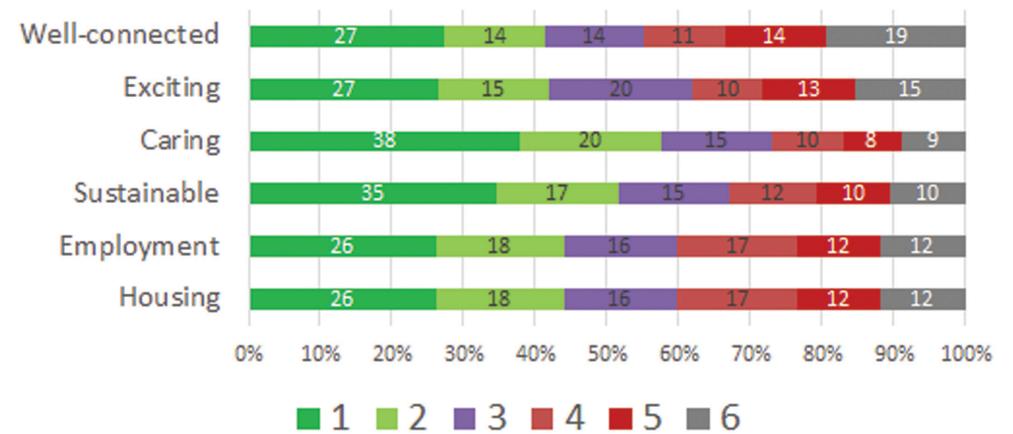
A visioning workshop which included a broad range of stakeholders was held in February 2020. Three further workshops to test and refine the vision developed in February were planned for March 2020. The first was undertaken the second and third moved to an online webinar and survey due to implications of the coronavirus lockdown.

The Ashford Residents' Survey was distributed to 10,000 households in February 2020. A 20% return rate was received.

### Consultation findings:

Positively, the consultations highlighted strong support for the overall structure and content of the vision, with most comments suggesting more minor modifications rather than large revisions or changes. This is exemplified through the results from the online survey. Three quarters of the importance ratings for the different sub-themes and scenarios provided ratings at 7 or above (with a rating of 10 representing the highest importance). The most important outcome was for Ashford being a Caring place to live. This was followed by Responsible Growth, seeing Ashford as a productive place to work. The third most highly rated goal was the Global Green Pioneer. These results were supported by those from the Residents Survey 2020. The priorities with the highest importance ratings were 'Caring', 'Sustainable' and Employment.

Figure – Importance ratings attached to different priority outcomes



Source: Ashford Borough Council Residents Survey 2020, April 2020



The online survey also asked respondents about the words that best reflected Ashford's aspirations. The most popular were: thriving (59%), wellbeing (59%) and shared prosperity (46%). This again confirmed core dimensions of the vision.

In addition, the consultations explored local stakeholders' perspectives on the most effective actions that could be taken in the area. Whilst many stakeholders were concerned about the impact of COVID-19, and reflected on the implications, there was a general feeling that it is now more important than ever to agree strong effective local action to manage the effects and enhance the short and long term recovery. As such, there was an overwhelming view that the long term vision and plan provided a vital opportunity to shape a strong and coherent response for the borough, and that if the right action was prioritised that this would help to ensure the immediate negative effects were short term. The survey asked respondents to rate achievability.

Most scenarios secured high ratings with the majority of stakeholders suggesting they were achievable. The exception was the global green pioneer, which had the lowest scores in achievability (but even then just under half of respondents gave ratings of 7 or above for achievability).

The open-ended survey comments and feedback at the workshop and webinar gave a sense of what actions local stakeholders felt to be important. Some of the most common and important feedback has been summarised below.

Many stakeholders raised concerns about the economic impact of COVID-19 and outlined the importance of actions that protected the pre-existing strengths and assets in the local economy. This outlined the vital role that foundational sectors, such as retail, hospitality, leisure and recreation, and food and drink production were already playing in the area, and which had seen significant growth and employment. There was concern that these sectors were supported in the recovery, to continue to support future growth. Relatedly, there was a call for responsible business and greater recognition for the value of essential and key workers. This included demands for better working practices that provided good, well paid work and terms and conditions that created careers of first choice. Aspects of responsible practices developed through the lockdown period involving retaining staff through job retention schemes and developing comprehensive health and safety plans that considered staff welfare, whilst remote working, as well as their safe return to work were given as examples that could be built upon.

Another area of common concern related to the need to protect essential services and to ensure that they reached the needs of different parts of the community, especially those made most vulnerable such as younger and older age groups, people from lower socio-economic groups, and those with pre-existing health conditions for example. Unsurprisingly, a key focus was placed on the vital role of health and social care to effectively support the sick and manage the public health measures to protect public safety. But, there was an emphasis on wider social concerns too such as housing and general public wellbeing and the vital role of broader community and voluntary services in meeting these broader community needs. People cited examples of existing initiatives such as One You that had the potential to be further developed to create a wider range of community out-reach activities through networks and hubs. Stakeholders felt that COVID-19 effectively demonstrated the potential of providing services remotely using digitally enabled tools to reach far reaching parts of the community, and that once social distancing measures were lightened these could be complemented with community-based meeting points and facilities providing on-line access as well as face to face services.

In the context of broad economic uncertainty, stakeholders also raised the important role of education and employment services, in addition, to business support. It was recognised that it was now more important than ever that individuals and businesses alike could access a range of support and advice to ensure they could take the best course of action moving forward, whether that was: accessing job retention schemes; pursuing upskilling, training, and re-skilling activities; securing advice about the best future employment or business opportunities; and accessing finance to support future development activities. An onus was placed on integrating such services as much as possible so that priority courses available locally for example aligned to the jobs available.

In setting out key actions and agreeing priorities for investment, stakeholders also emphasised the importance of "geography", and moving beyond the usual priority areas such as the Ashford and Tenterden town centres. That means ensuring a sufficiently balanced approach which is appropriately targeted, and reaches out to the different needs of all parts of the community across the borough, including rural areas.



Community Recovery												
Priority Action	ABC Lead	Partners	Savings	Income generation	Equalities objectives	Carbon reduction	Job creation	Building community resilience	Improving the customer journey	Revitalising the local economy	Promoting health and wellbeing	Tackling inequalities
Maintain and strengthen the community and voluntary sector	Arts and Cultural Industries Manager	Voluntary sector, parish councils, community councils, social enterprises										
Involve and enable individuals and communities to take an active part in civic society and local decision making	Head of Corporate Policy Economic Development and Communications	parish councils, community councils										
Undertake a community engagement programme, funded by the Kent Violence Reduction Unit. Pilot programme to be agreed in Bockhanger and Beaver	Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager	Parish and community councils										
Delivery of community safety recovery actions with partners, including the expanded KCC Community Warden service.	Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing	CSP										
Work closely with our health colleagues including support for the One You Shop	Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing	AHWP, KCHFT, KCC										
Enabling those adversely impacted by COVID-19 to access the help they need	Housing Operations Manager											



Organisational change and workforce development												
Priority Action	ABC Lead	Partners	Savings	Income generation	Equalities objectives	Carbon reduction	Job creation	Building community resilience	Improving the customer journey	Revitalising the local economy	Promoting health and wellbeing	Tackling inequalities
Balance the MTFP through sound financial management and generate long term income through secure investment opportunities	Head of IT and Finance											
Enable remote working for staff to continue where it is safe and productive to do so	Head of HR and Customer Services / Head of IT and Finance											
Review council owned assets	Deputy Head of Corporate Property & Projects											
Continue the digital transformation programme to increase access to services and public participation	Head of HR and Customer Services / Head of Corporate Policy Economic Development and Communications											
Develop and run an environmental awareness raising campaign for staff to increase knowledge and understanding and instigate behaviour change	Head of Corporate Policy Economic Development and Communications											
Deliver the council's commercial strategy to strengthen the council's commercial approach through generating income and improving the efficiency of services	Head of Environment and Land Management											

## Appendix D - Ashford Equalities Objectives

### Objective 1

Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do

We will do this by:

- Improving the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative information to shape decision making (e.g. through use of analytical tools, data sources and performance measures).
- Disseminating our improved understanding of different characteristics within our communities to members and officers using tools such as the borough profile and training.
- Maintaining and strengthen community resilience (e.g. maintaining the good relations with our partners built through the Covid-19 response and working together to understand where we may need to target interventions).
- Developing a community action plan.

### Objective 2

Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities.

We will do this by:

Further developing ways of engaging individual and communities to ensure their voice is heard (e.g. virtual meetings, social media campaigns, petition scheme).

### Objective 3

Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents

We will do this by:

- Enabling those adversely impacted by Covid-19 to get the help they need.
- Ensuring we are not leaving people behind when adapting our practices to take account of social distancing (e.g. allowing carers, interpreters and children to attend appointments).
- Delivering Digital transformation (e.g. new website that delivers our accessibility statement through embedded design principles).
- Including appropriate impact assessments in Cabinet reports and ensuring these are completed to a high standard (e.g. through regular reviews of draft Equality Impact Assessments).

### Objective 4

Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

We will do this by:

- Organisational cultural change (e.g. mandatory equalities and diversity training).
- Remote working (e.g. review of HR policies, production of remote working guidance, recruitment and selection and employee engagement).

## Appendix E – Ashford Design Principles

### Do the hard work, test and learn to keep it simple.

We need to regularly review our process – just because we have done it for years doesn't mean it's the best way. Working in an agile way where feedback on processes is actioned. Customers should have less points of contact. It's ok to make mistakes, as long as we learn from them and share our experiences.

### Focus on the customer journey, making it quick and uncomplicated to empower customers to do more for themselves.

We need to use data to inform the construction of the customer journey. Aligns with corporate values of Ambitious, Trustworthy and Creative. We must balance our digital persona with also being seen as human beings.

### Focus on the goals and delivery.

We need to know the purpose of what we're hoping to achieve. There should be a clear path of how we will do this set out at the start of a project.

### Less is more.

We need to work efficiently and smartly. Less is more. If something works we should look to reuse it elsewhere in the organisation.

### Distinctive.

We should be seen by others as trailblazing and distinctive developing new and innovative services using open source so that we can share. Thinking outside of the box and be risk aware, not risk averse. Ask yourself: "How can you make this process more distinctive as an ABC service?" We should dare to innovate, whether that is using new ways of working or existing solutions.

### Seamless approach.

We will put the customer at the heart of what we do. We'll provide easy to use digital services that collect information only once. We need to be consistent across council systems to provide resilience.

### Who needs this information?

When designing content or a process we should always be asking ourselves this question. We need to have an understanding of the customer's needs and should only collect the information we need. This information should only be collected once, at the first point of contact. Please share this information with other departments who may find it useful.

### Tell customers what to expect and keep them up to date along the way.

We must manage the expectations of our customers. They should be able to track the progress of their transactions/applications. We need to clearly communicate when they can expect to hear back from us and what else we may need. We should constantly seek feedback from our customers to continually improve services.

### This is for everyone.

Consider the ability of those using our services and create content/processes that can be completed by anyone. Ensure services and customer journeys are accessible. Write in plain English, use heading styles, explain acronyms, use alt text and cater for users who have English as a second language.

## Appendix F – Kent Resilience Forum – Principles for a Green Recovery

1. All investment to support recovery and future growth should have low or zero carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and aim for environmental net gain. This means new infrastructure, developments, processes and businesses should be looking to minimise the use of energy and water, reduce waste, promote the circular economy and use renewable energy and sustainable materials where possible. It also means that investment doesn't lock in carbon emissions in the future.

2. Employees and residents are supported to protect and enhance their wellbeing through a cleaner environment and more access to rich and varied nature. This means benefiting from the health and wellbeing advantages associated with: warmer, more energy efficient homes; better air quality inside and outside; increased access to public green space; and a high quality natural environment thriving with wildlife.

3. Communities are well connected both digitally, and through an effective network of footpaths, cycleways and public transport. This means active travel; public transport and low carbon vehicles are not only the best way to get around in our personal lives but the default for business travel and communications; virtual working is supported and encouraged; and homeworking is enabled to become the norm.

4. Future development and existing communities are resilient and adapted to the changing climate and severe weather events. This means adaptations are in place to cope with, and build resilience against, increased drought, flooding and heatwaves, and new designs account for these from the beginning.

5. Biodiversity is protected, restored and created; nature-based solutions are considered first and invested in at every opportunity. This means species are protected and, where threatened, are recovered; existing habitats and greenspaces are enhanced to regain and retain good health; communities are inspired by, and engaged with, their local environment and are realising the mental and physical health benefits of such a connection; and natural options to tackle climate change impacts such as flooding, temperature change and water management are considered before other options.

6. Ensure any green recovery solutions are equitable and fair; a green and equitable recovery go hand in hand. This means ensuring new greenspaces are planned in areas where everyone will see benefits and not just new development; and the delivery of clean growth does not affect some people disproportionately.

7. Greater partnership working and collaboration. This means engaging all parts of the community to contribute to and realise environmental, economic and social benefits.

## Appendix G – Glossary

ABC	Ashford Borough Council
AHWP	Ashford Health and Wellbeing Partnership
B&B	Bed and Breakfast accommodation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
DfT	Department for Transport
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HRA	Housing Revenue Account
KCC	Kent County Council
KCHFT	Kent Community Health Foundation Trust
KRF	Kent Resilience Forum
MTFP	Medium Term Financial Plan
NHS	National Health Service

## Appendix H – The Ashford Ambition report - July 2020, Executive Summary

In October 2019, Ashford Borough Council appointed Work Advance Ltd and Experian PLC to undertake a major futures study for the local area. The work has encompassed a blend of research, forecasting, scenario planning and extensive engagement with local stakeholders, to understand their views and aspirations for the future.

This process has supported the development of the Ashford Ambition: a strategic framework to shape a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for Ashford, Tenterden and the surrounding villages and rural areas in 2030 and beyond.

The work was commissioned during a period of considerable uncertainty: a new Government and policy agenda; Britain's exit from the European Union (EU); growth stalling in the global economy.

Since then of course, the world has shifted even more dramatically in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid spread of the novel virus is creating unprecedented challenges for national and local government across the UK, as well as Governments around the world. Paramount among these concerns are treating the sick, enforcing social distancing, supporting the vulnerable, maintaining vital community services, ensuring public safety, and mitigating the economic fallout for local businesses and residents.

While minds are undoubtedly focussed on responding to the current crisis, once the situation begins to stabilise longer-term strategic planning will be vital.

Now more than ever Ashford will need an agreed direction of travel: to act decisively to drive the recovery and exploit opportunities; to prioritise fiercely, focussing finite resources and funding on those actions that will move Ashford towards a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future.

There was a strong sense amongst local stakeholders that while it was clearly vital to consider and respond to the changed context the Covid-19 pandemic presents, that it was important not to let the current crisis knock Ashford off the ambitious path it has forged.

Many of these local stakeholders - though themselves busy dealing with the immediate fallout of the pandemic - emphasised that having a clear view of the future of the Borough was made more vital. That the aspirations articulated – the Ambition of a “caring and supportive place; where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector come together to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing” – feel all the more compelling as we reflect on these unprecedented times. That this work could in fact galvanise the community behind a shared Ambition that they themselves have developed, in order to deliver real and lasting change.

**The Ashford Ambition** - as set out in the next few pages and throughout the rest of this document - is ambitious indeed. It reflects Ashford's 'go first' 'self-made' attitude, forward-thinking mindset and appetite for growth and innovation. It is founded on what has been achieved in the past: the Borough's impressive growth performance, strategic location and investment decisions; distinct assets and sense of place. It acknowledges the diversity of the Borough - its mix of towns, villages and rural areas - and how this strengthens its position and offer. It seeks to reflect a place that is proud of its history but also keen to look to the future.

The weights and measures assigned to different outcomes has proved one of the most interesting findings from this work. Growth has and will continue to be a feature of Ashford's story - indeed it is central. In October 2019, Ashford Borough Council appointed Work Advance Ltd and Experian PLC to undertake a major futures study for the local area. The work has encompassed a blend of research,



forecasting, scenario planning and extensive engagement with local stakeholders, to understand their views and aspirations for the future. This process has supported the development of the Ashford Ambition: a strategic framework to shape a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for Ashford, Tenterden and the surrounding villages and rural areas in 2030 and beyond. to improving earnings and living standards. But stakeholders were clear that this should not come at cost to the environment and ecology of the Borough, only bring benefits to select people or places, or risk driving divides within the local community.

Rather, in line with a growing global agenda, [there was a strong consensus that the Borough should be prioritising other outcomes alongside growth, such as ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive in Ashford, strengthening cohesion, improving wellbeing and embracing a more sustainable way of life.](#)

The Ashford Ambition paints a picture of the Borough in 2030 and beyond that reflects these goals. There is much already underway - from the design principles of Chilmington Green, the Taittinger investment in local vineyards and plans at Newtown Works, to the 'Made in Ashford' and 'Ashford For' initiatives, the Scale Up programme, You Shop and the Council's success in reducing its own carbon footprint (to name a few). These set the Borough on the right course and there is no lack of ambition or commitment amongst local stakeholders to push forward at pace.

In identifying priority actions for the future we have looked back at past efforts and there is much on which to build. The 15 priority actions identified - which span the 5 strategic themes of economy; work and skills; communities;

environment and the visitor economy - emphasise the importance of existing interventions, explore how to enhance them further learning from best practice from elsewhere, and seek to promote greater alignment between local activities and county, regional and national initiatives. Further, many of these priority actions are mutually reinforcing - their collective impact will undoubtedly be greater than the sum of the parts. How the Borough measures impact and tracks progress towards the Ashford Ambition will be important too. A key aspect of our approach has been to model and quantify desired outcomes - to establish tangible goals to work towards, allowing Ashford Borough Council and its partners to 'start with the end in mind'.

Some of these targets have been economic in focus, for example increasing the numbers of jobs in the knowledge economy or driving significant improvements in productivity. Some consider other outcomes, such as improving qualifications, reducing the number of children affected by income deprivation or dramatically cutting and wholly offsetting carbon emissions, which are equally important. In addition, we argue that a new Ambition for inclusive and sustainable growth requires a new framework for [measuring what matters most to local people.](#)

We establish a robust and wide-ranging framework structured around five strategic themes. In a climate where local resources are limited and funding is stretched, this framework will be vital to ensure that effort and spend is directed towards those things that matter most to local residents and businesses, and will deliver greatest returns in achieving the Ashford Ambition: a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for the Borough in 2030 and beyond.





# Equality Impact Assessment

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1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:

- (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
- (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
- (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

## Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

## Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership\*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

\*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

## Due regard

5. Having 'due regard' is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
  - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.
  - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the

potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.

8. In terms of timing:

- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
- Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
- The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

### Armed Forces Community

9. As part of the council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community made through the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant the council's Cabinet agreed in November 2017 that potential impacts on the Armed Forces Community should be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

10. Accordingly, due regard should also be had throughout the decision making process to potential impacts on the groups covered by the Armed Forces Covenant:

- Current serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- Former serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- The families of current and former Armed Forces personnel.

### Case law principles

11. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:

- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
- Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
- A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or

service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)

<b>Lead officer:</b>	Lorna Ford / Jennifer Shaw
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Decision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy, project, service, contract</li> <li>• Review, change, new, stop</li> </ul>	Recovery Plan 2020/21
<b>Date of decision:</b> The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2020
<b>Summary of the proposed decision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims and objectives</li> <li>• Key actions</li> <li>• Expected outcomes</li> <li>• Who will be affected and how?</li> <li>• How many people will be affected?</li> </ul>	<p>The Recovery Plan sets out the councils actions to aid the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic over the next 18 months.</p> <p>The Plan sets out how the council will bring forward new ways of working, enable the delivery of key infrastructure, support economic recovery and strengthen community resilience. Central to the Plan is achieving a more sustainable way of living for residents, communities and business.</p> <p>The outcome of the Recovery Plan is to give Ashford a secure basis on which to work towards achieving its long term ambition through the adoption of the Corporate Plan, Economic Development Strategy and Carbon Neutral Strategy in 2022.</p> <p>Everyone living and working in the borough will have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic to some extent.</p> <p>Therefore the Recovery Plan will be relevant to most residents, business owners and employers depending on their own circumstances and the level to which their life and livelihoods have been disrupted.</p>
<b>Information and research:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the information and research that has informed the decision.</li> <li>• Include sources and key findings.</li> </ul>	<p>The Ashford Futures study, to inform the long term ambition for the borough and the next Corporate Plan and Economic Development Strategy was extensively consulted on prior to the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent restrictions.</p> <p>Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Corporate Policy carried out the council's biennial Residents' Survey, which assesses resident's opinions of the council, its service provision and the local area. This survey is pivotal in understanding issues affecting particular groups in the borough through cross-tab analysis. In particular, older people generally have a lower opinion of Ashford Town Centre and the council as a whole. Notably, the survey highlighted some issues faced by residents with physical disabilities, such as the lack of toilet provision and accessibility issues in some places. The survey data provides a better understanding of potential equalities challenges moving forward.</p>

<p><b>Consultation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What specific consultation has occurred on this decision?</li> <li>• What were the results of the consultation?</li> <li>• Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics?</li> <li>• What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics?</li> </ul>	<p>Ashford Futures study and residents survey are informing this Recovery Plan.</p> <p>Informal consultation, revision by MT and the Cabinet members</p> <p>Due to pandemic unable to undertake face to face and formal consultation is minimum of six weeks which would delay implementation.</p>

**Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.**

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

<b>Protected characteristic</b>	<b>Relevance to Decision</b> High/Medium/Low/None	<b>Impact of Decision</b> <b>Positive</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Negative</b> (Major/Minor) <b>Neutral</b>
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	High – impacts of coronavirus on health and wellbeing due to shielding and underlying health issues	Positive (major) - number of interventions to ensure appropriate support. Continuing partnership working with voluntary sector.
Middle age	Medium – economic hardship e.g. furloughed, potential job losses, child care stresses	Positive (Major) - economic regeneration measures, support / advice for business, creation of new industries, skills development
Young adult	High – more impact for young people particularly those seeking entry level employment. Disruption to education.	Positive (Major) - economic regeneration measures, support / advice for business, creation of new industries, skills development, working with college and local business
Children	Medium – disruption to education High – safeguarding issues	Positive (minor) - flexible working practices for ABC employees.

		Maintaining safeguarding procedures and awareness
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	High – impacts of coronavirus on health and wellbeing due to shielding and underlying health issues, accessing public transport, isolation	Positive (major) - number of interventions to ensure appropriate support. Continuing partnership working with voluntary sector
Mental	High – isolation, unable to access services / support, pressures from financial hardship	Positive (major) - number of interventions to ensure appropriate support. Continuing partnership working with voluntary sector
Sensory	High – isolation, unable to access services / support, pressures from financial hardship	Positive (major) - number of interventions to ensure appropriate support. Continuing partnership working with voluntary sector
<u>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</u>	None	Neutral
<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	Medium – heighten possibility of domestic abuse	Positive (minor) - community engagement for well-being and safety. Usual safeguarding practices.
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	N/A	N/A
<u>RACE</u>	High – disproportionate negative impact of coronavirus on BAME groups, health and financial status	Positive (major) - targeting less affluent neighbourhoods and providing ongoing support through community initiatives
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	Low	Neutral
<u>SEX</u> Men	Low - risk of unemployment is higher in lower paid employment	Positive (minor) economic interventions but not specifically targeted at men
Women	Medium – potentially high unemployment for women in part time and low paid work	Positive (minor) economic interventions but not specifically targeted at women
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	None	Neutral
<u>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY</u> Regular/Reserve personnel	None	Neutral

Former service personnel	Medium - risk of homelessness	Positive (major) housing intervention and temporary housing interventions that will be of benefit to homeless persons
Service families	Low	Neutral

<p><b>Mitigating negative impact:</b></p> <p>Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.</p>	Regular monitoring of coronavirus and our recovery plan actions will ensure any negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics are recognised and reported to ensure mitigating steps can be taken.
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<p><b>Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty?</b></p> <p>Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's <a href="#">Essential Guide</a>, alongside fuller <a href="#">PSED Technical Guidance</a>.</p>	
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Yes / No / N/A</b>
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	N/A Recovery Plan is not discriminatory
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	Yes

<p><b>Conclusion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider how due regard has been had to the equality duty, from start to finish.</li> <li>There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above).</li> <li>Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified.</li> <li>How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or</li> </ul>	<p>Local data has been used (Ashford Futures study and Residents Survey) as well as monitoring of national trends. The Recovery Plan should have positive outcomes across groups who have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. And to enable a swift recovery for all groups of the community. The Recovery Plan will be monitored by the Management Team reporting to the Recovery Monitoring and Advisory Group.</p> <p>The Interim Equalities Objectives will be adopted at the same time as the Recovery Plan to ensure any potential impacts arising from Recovery Plan actions are noted and intervention completed accordingly.</p>
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decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported?	
<b>EIA completion date:</b>	26 June 2020