

Planning for recovery: HBC priority themes and actions - Autumn 2020

Introduction

The last few months have brought unprecedented change across the world and in Hastings in response to the global Covid 19 pandemic.

As a Council, together with our partners, we have managed to support residents, through the Hastings Community Hub, to support businesses with advice on how to operate safely and follow government guidelines and with the distribution of some £21m in business grants to over 1800 businesses. We have also managed our services effectively, changing some to operate differently for safety reasons, and keep all of our key services running with minimal detrimental impact.

We have faced significant changes to the way we work and still face considerable budgetary challenges in providing services going forward. The investment and improvements we have made over recent years to improve how we work, the technology we use and how we deliver services have enabled us to adapt quickly, work remotely and maintain services in ways that would not have been imaginable had the pandemic struck any earlier.

Our response to the emergency has also seen us rapidly deliver new and essential support to residents and businesses to help them in this crisis. Some of the examples of the additional support we put in place include the Hastings Community Hub – set up with our community partners to help the most vulnerable residents get support for basic essential needs such as food and medicines as well as befriending support and much more. We have also distributed £253 000 to date in respect of government Council Tax hardship for those eligible for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The response to the emergency has also highlighted the fantastic communities that exist within Hastings. The ability and capacity of the local voluntary sector, the work of the public sector and the resilience of our people and local businesses have been an exemplar for how modern communities can work and support each other, for the greater good.

We recognise the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on our poorer communities, on our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) residents, on our older and our disabled residents. Therefore, these communities are at the heart of our recovery planning; as a key part of building the resilience of the town.

As the Government continue to ease the lockdown restrictions, we have set out our priority themes and actions for how we will continue to respond to this emergency, and help the town recover whilst also being prepared for further Covid 19 resurgence.

Kim Forward, Leader of the council

Jane Hartnell, Managing Director

Executive Summary

Purpose

- To set out our themes and actions **for ongoing management and recovery** from Covid 19 for Hastings Borough Council and the role HBC will play in contributing to the town's resilience and recovery.
- To reconcile commitments the Council made in its **Corporate plan and Budget** agreed in February 2020 with those new or changed commitments brought about as a result of the onset of Covid 19.
- To share our themes and actions to **extend** and **build on** the intensive work with our **partners** in the public, business, voluntary and community sectors, who over the past few months have come together at speed to steer the town through the **challenges** and **opportunities** ahead.
- To ensure that, as much as possible, we use this unprecedented opportunity to build a stronger, more resilient and more connected town.

The council's response to Covid 19

- Although the infection and death rate in Hastings has thankfully been comparatively low to date, the impact on the **local economy** and people's **way of life** has been significant, and the long-term impact will likely be felt beyond when other towns and communities have recovered.
- From an **organisational perspective**, the council has successfully enabled most of its staff to **work from home**. This is likely to continue over the medium-term.
- The way many **council services** are delivered has also changed, with most of the **customer contact** now provided via the **council website** and **over the phone**. A move that was already in train and which has been accelerated by the pandemic.
- The **Community Hub** was set up to support the **most vulnerable** in the town. Between 26th March and 16th August, the hub supported 1271 households.
- Accommodation continues to be available to **all rough sleepers in Hastings**, with **food and medicine** delivered directly to accommodation alongside access to **mental** and **physical health** assessments and support.
- The council had paid out **£20,235,000** in grants to **1740 businesses**. A **discretionary grants scheme** has also been delivered and has paid out a further £1.153 m to 128 businesses.
- The town's **parks and green spaces** have been kept open for residents to take exercise during lockdown, support mental and physical wellbeing, whilst adhering to social distancing requirements.
- Gradually, as it is safe to do so, **re-opening facilities** closed to protect resident wellbeing such as playgrounds, MUGAs, cliff railway, public toilets, museum (most now open).

Engaging with residents, businesses and community groups

- It is crucial that we **consult and engage** with a range of partners, residents and businesses to ensure that future plans are comprehensive and that the town feels **connected to recovery** and resilience efforts, we need to write our story for our future together ensuring **many voices** can contribute as part of an **ongoing conversation** with the breadth of our local community.
- The council will also use the variety of **communications and media channels** it has available to consult and engage with residents and businesses, including the use of social media; resident consultations; use of our **Citizen newsletter**; and use of **Ward councillors** to gather views.
- The council's Overview & Scrutiny committee is considering how best to enable input from **citizens** to **contribute ideas** and have them incorporated into planning and monitoring of that planning.
- The **Local Strategic Partnership, Hastings and Rother Taskforce and Town Deal Board** provides opportunities to seek views from a range of partners, from the business, public, voluntary and community sectors as well as work in partnership with them to lever in funding and investment
- The private/public sector **1066 Country marketing partnership**, managed by HBC, has worked extensively with local businesses in the **tourism** and **leisure** sector throughout to develop and implement a phased action plan as the sector has gradually reopened, and will continue to do so.
- The council will work closely with residents, businesses and community groups to open **community spaces** and venues where safe to do so, recognising the invaluable mental, social and physical health benefits.

Planning for recovery

The following themes and actions provide a **basis for our short and medium term work both internally and with partners**:

1. **Securing the council's finances** – lobby government to fully compensate the council for the financial impacts of Covid 19; review budgets to identify scope for in-year savings; refresh the council's medium-term financial strategy to set the framework for developing the budget for 2021/22 onwards, reduce non-essential spending.
2. **Modernising the council; reimagining local services** – review provision of facilities to enable the majority of staff to continue to work from home; remodel how services are delivered and recast service transformation plans; continue to develop IT and our website to facilitate on-line delivery of services, and to capture citizen insight, improve customer care and drive efficiencies.
3. **Supporting the most vulnerable** – integrate the Community Hub into our customer contact centre arrangements, develop a sustainable approach to tackling homelessness; continue to work with partners to develop longer-term

pathways out of poverty for our most 'left behind' residents ensuring that they do not fall to the back of the queue for recovery focussed opportunities, (e.g. those with complex needs could be easy to overlook in the determination to fix unemployment quickly); also support adults and families where unemployment has not been an experience to date to navigate help and support effectively; be ready and prepared for further Covid 19 phases, and plan to minimise such an impact on the most vulnerable.

- 4. Business and the local economy** – Align and define our economic recovery intentions with our partners including East Sussex County Council and Team East Sussex in order to maximise resources to the area, develop our economy to respond to the new and emerging trends, keep spend circulating within the town, celebrate the contribution and diversity of our small businesses, value the contribution of businesses run by Black Asian and Minority Ethnic business people and retain a focus on our most vulnerable citizens.

Use our licensing powers to support businesses to reopen safely and develop where possible; identify options with partners to further promote sustainable travel, with a focus on walking and cycling; complete the programme of grant allocations to business and any further funding that becomes available, pursue a holistic approach to reducing the incidence of antisocial behaviour exhibited by some of the street community, working with partners to address their addiction issues and robustly enforce where behaviour is anti-social or criminal, develop and secure a Town Investment Plan to get access up to £25m of capital funding for investment in the town, and building a larger town deal which will hopefully see more investment being leveraged into the town.

We will continue to work with partners to deliver the ambitions of the East Sussex economic recovery plan across the next 18 months, building further opportunities for collaboration through the Hastings and Rother economic taskforce, the LEP wide Coastal Communities team, the 1066 County marketing partnership, the Hastings Local Strategic partnership and town deal board to benefit from other funding schemes which arise for larger scale interventions.

- 5. Housing, regeneration and development** – support people in the private rented sector, including taking action against rogue landlords; reprioritising our capital programme in line with work to secure council finances, pursuing regeneration and development commitments in our corporate plan having reviewed their feasibility given the onset of Covid 19, securing appropriate funding opportunities in partnership, to enable schemes the council and its partners may not otherwise afford to do, using the development of the Local Plan as a catalyst to define the spatial and infrastructure needs for our town and using our towns existing buildings and spaces. This will help determine

what we want to develop/enhance or protect especially as we work towards being a low carbon town in the future.

- 6. Tourism, leisure, culture and heritage** – Physically reopen our museum (now open) and attractions having reviewed their feasibility, continue to work with the arts, heritage and culture sector to enable the town’s institutions and events to reopen in a safe and or deliver in a different way; engage with the sector to understand the issues it faces and seek solutions together. We will collaborate with the sector and other partners to seize the opportunity to reinvigorate our domestic tourism market where capacity and resources allow, towards our town’s vision for the future through the Local Plan process and in developing a Town Investment Plan.

Opportunities to exercise has been a central feature of the Chief Medical Officer’s Covid 19 response throughout the pandemic. To help support the health and wellbeing of our residents, the Council has committed to help reinvigorate physical activity levels by financially supporting the local leisure operator to help it remain viable during lockdown and off-set the unmitigated costs of reopening the leisure centres.

- 7. Climate change** – to put tackling climate change at the heart of all strategic decision making and project and service delivery, in support of the Climate Emergency motion the council declared during 2019; to deliver the [climate change action plan](#) to meet the council’s carbon emissions target across council operations and assets; seek investment to further promote sustainable travel; ensure that future housing and regeneration schemes are subject to the highest possible environmental standards for both new developments and existing buildings. The council will look to support retrofitting, sustainable building solutions, roof top energy generation, bio diversity, tree planting and green corridors where possible and practicable.
- 8. Harnessing social capital** – Make the most of our town’s steadfast community spirit and commitment to work together in partnership, most recently evidenced through joint efforts to establish the Community Hub. Build on the lessons learned from Covid 19 to date, so that we are even better placed to deal with further or similar in the future; use procurement powers, Foreshore community grants and supporting joint partnership funding bids to help address gaps and need in the town and across the voluntary and community sector; develop communications strategies which create two-way conversations with communities to inform decision-making. Work with partners continuing to build resilience among the people of the town, encourage volunteering, community skills and training. The council is also keen to welcome new communities encouraging the integration and contribution of the full cross section of our community as it evolves, grows and changes.

Measuring progress

- The use of **appropriate data** will be critical in identifying the key issues resulting from Covid 19, developing the right **policy response** and **measuring the success** of recovery.
- The Council is currently **refreshing existing performance management arrangements**, reconciling the commitments made in the council's corporate plan with those new or changed activities the council is now undertaking given the onset of Covid 19.
- It is intended that refreshed arrangements will allow **improved tracking** of what the council is doing and how we are resourcing activity live on our website, moving away from static quarterly performance reports and developing a more dynamic **dashboard** of key measures.
- The Council's **Overview and Scrutiny** Committee have refocussed their annual programme to focus on recovery and resilience and will work as a **critical friend** to the council's Cabinet and with other partners to track associated performance and ensure the council delivers on commitments set out where possible and practicable.

Priorities and actions

Some of the actions the council will take are **short-term**, such as measures to support **social distancing** in the town and reopening of our retail, visitor and hospitality industries. Others, such as **building new homes** and regenerating the town, will be **longer-term** programmes. Together, these actions form part of the town's initial recovery and longer-term prosperity.

Building on this, the intention is to work with local partners to develop a comprehensive **recovery action plan** as well as a suite of **data and indicators where there is capacity to do so**, to monitor and compare progress locally regionally and nationally.

The role of the borough council in the recovery of Hastings

The town's recovery from Covid19 will be taken forward **incrementally**, through close **partnership working** across the public sector, with business, the voluntary and community sector.

The council has a civic duty as a community leader, **convenor of partners, and driver of change**. In order to achieve this role, it will require the council to bring the right people and organisations together to help develop a comprehensive approach to recovery, with an associated shared **statement of intent** and prospective **action plan** which is jointly owned across the local partnership. Much of the ground work here will benefit from the recent partnership work to establish the **Community Hub** and the **Town Deal Board** working with a cross

section of the **Local Strategic Partnership** and associated networks. However, it is recognised maintaining partnerships requires resources and the current crisis has generated new forms of activity and methods of engagement. How partnership forums and opportunities to engage with communities and businesses are better utilised needs to be reviewed.

In terms of **governance and oversight** the Audit and Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to hold Cabinet and Council to account as part of their regulatory functions working with partners where appropriate. It has been noted earlier in this document that the Overview and Scrutiny committee are concentrating their work programme on recovery and resilience and they will be continuing to track council performance as the council reconciles existing corporate plan and budget commitments with new Covid 19 activities.

This document also notes the range of partnerships and their associated governance arrangements already in place and acknowledges the need to **avoid** any potential **duplication** or overlap, given the stretched resources of the Council and partners in response to the onset of Covid 19.

It is anticipated that this document will serve as a launchpad for the **Local Strategic Partnership** (LSP) to galvanise town wide resilience and recovery efforts, towards a shared narrative and potential plan. It will then be for the LSP working with the council as lead partner to arrive at associated governance arrangements.

Theme 1: Securing the council's finances

Why it is important

The pandemic will have a **significant impact** on the council's budget during the 2020-21 financial year and over the medium-term. The impact of **increased costs** and **reduced income** has been felt across local government and, although Whitehall has provided additional funding, it is far from enough to plug the funding gap that has developed.

The council has coped as well as possible with a **decade of austerity** between 2010 and 2020; the Council has seen government funding reductions of some 72% over this period – a loss of some £64m to the town.

However, the scale of the in-year budget impact from Covid 19 is unprecedented and, although the council can call on its limited remaining **reserves** to limit the impact, tough decisions will have to be made in this year and in future years to get the council's finances back onto a sustainable footing. The Medium Term Financial Strategy estimates that some £2.7m of Council Reserves will now be

required to balance the budget in 2020/21 – this is up from the figure of £1.182m identified in the budget agreed by Council in February 2020.

The impact of Covid 19 has resulted a combination of increased costs (e.g. housing homeless people, investment in IT to allow staff to work from home, food costs for vulnerable people, Council tax Reduction scheme costs) and lost income (e.g. from car parks, commercial rents, planning fees, licensing, event bookings, investment income, business rates). These impacts are expected to effect the Council for a number of years to come. Unless action is taken or the government provide additional funding, the deficits are forecast to be some £2.3m in 2021/22, £2.2m in 2022/23, and £2.2m in 2023/24.

To date, the council has been awarded £1,208,935m in **additional funding** from government to deal with the crisis but this falls significantly short of the combined budget pressures the council is facing in terms of increased costs and lost income. The government have announced a scheme for reimbursing some of the income lost from Sales, Fees and charges: This is estimated to amount to some £800,000 for 2020/21.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on collection rates for **council tax, and business rates**. The lower collection rates also significantly impact on the County Council, Police and Fire Authority. There remains much uncertainty as to the impact of the recession on the additional costs and loss of income for the Council. For example, the costs of the Council Tax Support Scheme are expected to increase significantly as the Furlough scheme ends and unemployment levels increase. The financial impacts over the medium-term are hard to assess. Given the lower levels of reserves the Council could be faced with making greater in-year savings if it receives unexpected financial shocks in the future.

Whilst the council will continue to join with the wider local government sector to **lobby government** for more funding to limit the impact on local services – and wider reform of council financing over the longer-term – it needs to take decisions now in order to reduce the predicted overspends for 2020/21 and set a balanced budget for 2021/22. In that sense, the council's approach is to **argue for the best but plan for the worst**.

The council is mindful of the potential Government white paper on **Devolution** and emerging Government preference for **Unitary** local government structures. The council will lobby, with our local, regional and national partners for the best possible outcomes for our communities.

Impact on council costs

The council has incurred significant **additional costs** through its response to Covid 19. This includes, but is not limited to, establishing a community hub,

administering business grants, as well as providing accommodation to rough sleepers.

Impact on council income

In response to significantly reduced funding from government over the past decade, the council – like every other local authority across the country – has had to **diversify its revenue streams** in order to pay for vital local services.

As a consequence, the council is reliant upon funding from a **range of income sources** including commercial rents, car parks and income from leisure facilities. These sources of income have been **significantly negatively impacted** by the pandemic.

Furthermore, these incomes streams are likely to continue to be impacted by the predicted longer-term **downturn in the economy**.

The economic consequences of Covid 19 will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the income the council collects from **council tax and business rates** – all of which pays for vital local services. This impact will be exacerbated if the current situation continues longer than hoped.

Medium-term financial impact

Looking beyond the immediate impacts of Covid 19, the financial environment for local government remains extremely challenging for the foreseeable future. There is a legal requirement for all councils to **set a balanced budget** each year.

There continues to be **growing gap** between funding and service pressures, driven by demographic change, unfunded burdens and limited opportunities to raise income locally through council tax. This places increasing pressure on council services.

The current system of local government funding needs **fundamental reform** to ensure that councils remain financially sustainable. This is no longer about austerity – it is about providing **appropriate funding to deliver local services**. Without more funding from government in the short-term and changes in the longer-term to how councils are funded, local services will suffer.

The underlying assumptions which formed the basis of the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) have been fundamentally altered by the impact of Covid 19. This will require the council to **review its corporate plan and objectives in the light of available resources**; changes will be considered as part of the 2021/22 budget and corporate plan processes.

The council will:

- Closely monitor and update budget impact analysis and regularly update Cabinet.
- Lobby government to ensure that Hastings Council - and local government more widely - is fully compensated for the financial impacts of Covid 19.
- Conduct a corporate review of all 2020-21 revenue budgets to identify areas for immediately reducing in-year expenditure through additional controls on non-essential spend and recruitment.
- Review the capital programme to ensure that the schemes still reflect the council's current priorities and that these are affordable in the new financial landscape.
- Update the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), to understand the short to medium implications for savings requirements and use of reserves.
- Commence the process for setting the revised budget for 2021/22 and budget for 2021/22 in line with the reduced resources available in future years as identified in the MTFS (Cabinet meeting – 5 October 2020).

Theme 2: Modernising the council; reimagining local services

Why it is important

Towards a new way of working

Covid 19 has forced the council to change **how it operates** and **how it delivers services** to residents. Whilst some of this change has been hard, the organisation now has the capability to work and deliver differently – to build on the technological changes made to become a **modern, flexible organisation** with the potential to change its culture and improve **staff wellbeing**.

The council is continuing to look at options for **improving its IT functionality** and is continuing to roll out new functions on Microsoft Teams as a tool to enable the meeting or communications between staff, partners, councillors and citizens. New self-service modules will also enable customer services and revenues and benefits teams to work more flexibly and improve services to residents.

As we look to the future, there are opportunities to **join up across teams** in a more proactive way, with staff working towards clear outcomes rather than through specified processes, and empowering staff to achieve their objectives through greater **trust and flexibility**.

Although there is a desire to **bring more staff back into Muriel Matters House**, it is important that the council builds upon the flexibilities it has developed. With changes to the internal layout - which are necessary to support social distancing - the building will not be able to accommodate all staff at the same time. This means that staff will need to **continue to work flexibly**.

As well as benefits to staff, increased flexibility and home working has the potential to **create efficiencies** and generate opportunities in terms of utilising space within Muriel Matters House. The building provides the opportunity to co-locate with appropriate partners and subject to market conditions scope to lease portions of the building.

There is an opportunity to build on the positive changes made in order to modernise and **change the culture** of the organisation, with staff retaining the ability to work in a way which better suits their personal circumstances and managers encouraged (and where needed, trained) to manage according to a model based on outputs rather than whether someone is in the office or not.

Increased productivity stems from having an **empowered workforce** which is trusted to deliver, with the ability to work flexibly to enable a positive work/life balance.

In that sense, the Covid 19 pandemic is likely to lead to a **paradigm shift** in how office-based organisations operate. It is vital that the council grasps these opportunities in the best interests of staff and unlocks the potential efficiencies they can create, building on the good progress the council has made through its digital design and transformation programme in recent years.

The period during lockdown has demonstrated that the council can deliver **change at pace** and it is important to **continue that momentum**. Through necessity, the council adapted how services are delivered, with the increased use of technology and **channel shift** away from face to face to online support. Whilst it is important to guard against digital exclusion, there is an opportunity to embed the learning from the council's response to **reimagine how services are delivered**.

While the council intends to build on the opportunities for change suggested it remains firmly committed to ensuring change is in line with the council's **equalities** commitments. The council will continue to ensure that its work practices, culture and service provision is one that promotes **equality of opportunity for all** to reflect the breadth and diversity of its staff and the communities we serve.

The council will continue to assess **equality impact** in the development and roll out of existing, changed or new services. The council is mindful of how the onset of Covid 19 has impacted disproportionately on **BAME communities** and, through impact assessment and review, will seek to minimise such impacts for our staff, partners and citizens where possible and practicable. The town's Equality and Human Rights Charter will be refreshed to take account of this and other issues to ensure it is fit for purpose for 2020 onwards.

The work with partners on the Community Hub has demonstrated how effective the council's support to vulnerable people can be when it is **joined up**, as well as the role communities can play in **shaping and supporting their own neighbourhoods**. There is an opportunity to **learn lessons** from these experiences and apply it to how the council works with vulnerable people and communities through the recovery and in how council services are re-shaped.

Building on the changes made to council operations and service delivery, the council will **revisit its transformation programme**, with each part of the organisation tasked with looking at how services can be **delivered differently** or reviewing progress since changing service provision, in order to improve user experiences and create efficiencies. In doing so, the council will continue to look at how technology can be used to deliver more accessible services and involve service users as it does so.

Key actions:

- Implement changes to the internal layout and other safety measures within Muriel Matters House and other council buildings to support social distancing as more staff return to the office when it is appropriate to do so, with a risk assessment of the building carried out and unions engaged.
- Continue to allow staff to work from home where possible, striking a balance between home and safe office-based working and allowing flexibility for staff.
- Take forward an organisation wide review of service delivery, to look at reimagining how services are delivered in future where equalities and environmental impact considerations are at the heart of our review, and recast service plans in the light of this service review,
- Review the decisions that have been taken as part of the crisis response to stop, start or amend service delivery – and the experience of working in different ways – to consider lessons learned and apply them to services over the longer-term.
- Use insight from citizens interactions with us combined with our ongoing communications with partners and residents to inform how we reshape council activities and those we undertake with our partners.
- Take the appropriate steps to ensure the council is EU-exit ready.

Theme 3: Supporting the most vulnerable

Why it is important

Data from the most recent [IMD](#) as well as information on Hastings in East Sussex's State of the County report suggest that Hastings still faces significant challenges and inequalities in comparison to its nearest neighbours. These are likely to be exacerbated as a result of the onset of Covid 19.

The pandemic has left many households reliant on state support such as **Universal Credit**. Many of these household were just about 'getting by' before the pandemic, with the impacts of Covid 19 is likely to have made the situation worse. The council is also mindful of our children and young people who have not been in school and those whom will not have undertaken exams as expected and support them deal with the uncertainty that this brings.

The work of the council in responding to the crisis, including working with partners to establish the Community Hub to support vulnerable residents, additional council tax relief and other financial assistance, means that the authority is currently providing a level of **direct support** to many residents that exceeds usual provision.

This level of support will, over time, be **reduced**, as the council move out of crisis response. This will require a **collaborative approach** with others, both statutory partners who have specific duties around vulnerable cohorts (particularly DWP, the county council, our CVS and the health sector), and with a wide range of voluntary and community sector agencies who provide services and have trusted relationships with residents.

The relationship with these groups will need to be **multi-faceted**, not simply a relationship based on grant-funding or contractual arrangements - or as a conduit for communications - but based on **two-way dialogue**, to understand the issues that they and their service users are facing, as well as learning lessons about where council policy and practice is hindering positive outcomes.

In addition, there is likely to be a long-term need to maintain **holistic support** for some residents who face particular disadvantage. Key to this is integrating the services the council provides more closely with other services for vulnerable groups, for example mental health and substance dependency services. The council has been leading work through the Rough Sleeping Initiative, creating a multi-disciplinary team of health, mental health, substance dependency and housing specialists to improve access to services. Learning from this project could be applied to a variety of different client groups.

Although there will continue to be structural drivers of inequality, the council's approach will be focused on developing **local resilience to future system shocks**. This will require a strategic approach with appropriate internal and external governance in order to be successful.

A sustainable solution to homelessness and rough sleeping

Hastings has a long-standing challenge with high demand for our homelessness services, principally caused by shortage of affordable housing solutions locally. Demand for our homelessness services is expected to increase during the

recovery phase from coronavirus, particularly if the economic downturn continues.

The council has responded well to increased demand for **emergency accommodation** and has offered support to all rough sleepers. However, providing emergency accommodation alone is not a satisfactory solution. The council will continue to provide **wrap-around support** to vulnerable people while helping them find an appropriate housing solution. We are working closely with the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government, to expand accommodation options for individuals with multiple and complex needs, including supported accommodation and Housing First style units.

We are also developing work packages to increase the supply of accommodation and improve the quality of housing and neighbourhoods. Together with our new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, these three work packages will make up the council's new housing strategy.

Through the recovery, the council will continue to work proactively with partners to develop a **sustainable approach** to homelessness, including integrating our services more closely with health, mental health, substance dependency and employability services. This will mean we can continue to provide **'wrap-around' support and pathways out of poverty** for the most vulnerable in the town.

Key actions:

- Work proactively to develop a sustainable approach to tackling homelessness in the town.
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- Integrate homelessness services with other support for vulnerable people, including the launch of our CHART-funded project Live, Work, Thrive.
- Continue to manage our use of emergency accommodation as cost effectively as possible, through the expansion of the Social Lettings Agency's private sector leasing scheme, capital investment in our own accommodation and alternative booking arrangements.
- Develop a bid to the government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme, to expand accommodation options for individuals with multiple and complex needs.
- Adopt a new Housing Strategy and review key policy documents, including the Social Housing Allocation scheme
- Mainstream Community Hub first line response activity to be delivered via the council's Community Contact Centre.
- Implement new self-service modules for revenues and benefits.
- Maintain our website to provide services, support, advice and guidance and enable online access to our key committee meetings.
- Robust plans with partners (local and pan Sussex) in readiness for further outbreaks

- Start delivery of the CHART programme from September 2020 now that some easement in the lock down and 121 contact has been made possible.

Theme 4: Business and the local economy

Why it is important

The council will work closely with businesses across all sectors and support them to **open safely**, where they can.

The council's objective is to support the local economy whilst doing what it can to **protect residents and visitors** from the virus and to take steps where appropriate to **minimise resurgence** of the virus.

The visitor economy is worth around £360m to Hastings and supports over 6500 jobs in the town. 1066 Country marketing, the private/public sector tourism partnership managed by HBC, has worked closely with businesses in the visitor economy since before the full lockdown started, planning and then delivering messaging/advertising/editorial support/etc., as the lockdown eased. It has received very favourable feedback from the sector for what it has done to date. The nature of the lockdown easing meant this has been very nuanced, and there is still much more work to do, particularly in the international market (hitherto comprising c20% by value of our visitor economy).

Reopening the High Street Safely fund (TBC)

This project will be funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and will support businesses on the high street and neighbourhood shopping areas to get back on track and ensure that people can enjoy their time visiting their local high street safely.

Businesses will be supported through:

- Advice and guidance relating to Covid 19
- Targeted marketing campaign for specific shopping areas- to boost confidence in visiting/ using shopping areas
- Use of the public Wi-Fi network in Hastings town centre – helping to digitalise transactions/ services

Enforcement against businesses which fail to protect staff

The council – through its environmental protection team – has a role to play in helping to ensure that businesses in the town put in place measures to **protect staff** as they reopen.

Although capacity in this area is under pressure, the council will use its powers to advise employees of their **right to work in a safe environment** and – where

employers are in breach of regulations or where there is evidence of malpractice – can instigate **enforcement measures**.

Funding to businesses

The council has delivered significant support to business via **grants and business rates relief** and in the way it has worked with **suppliers** and **business tenants**. This close liaison will continue through the recovery phase. In addition, the council is also in the process of approving potential projects to be considered as part of £1m Accelerator funding.

The council has distributed a further £1.153m in **discretionary grants** to businesses in need of financial support, on top of the £20m paid out under the government's Small Business and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grant schemes.

Broadband and digital connectivity

With more businesses and individuals **working remotely** during lockdown – and with this trend likely to continue over the longer-term – it is essential that action is taken to continue to **improve broadband speeds** and the level of **digital connectivity** across the town.

The council will continue to work in partnership and lobby for improvements to support digital connectivity and associated infrastructure where appropriate. We are keen to **future proof** the town by removing **barriers to home working** and enabling adoption of technologies to support digital inclusion, advanced health and social care and energy efficiency.

Social inclusion

Evidence suggests that those in deprived areas and those from minority groups are in low skilled, low wage or unstable work have been **disproportionately affected** by Covid 19. Barriers to employability, low social inclusion and the quality of jobs have been identified as issues that need to be tackled to deliver an inclusive economy. Covid 19 has adversely impacted these, already deep-seated, challenges.

The response to these issues will need to adapt over time, from the current focus on providing grants and business rates relief, to enabling businesses to re-open and potentially shut again at short notice in a safe way and then, over the medium term, to consider how the local economy can adapt and create an **inclusive economy** where the benefits of economic activity are shared by all.

Existing relationships with businesses and organisations including the BID, Hastings Chamber of Commerce, East Sussex County Council 1066 Country marketing and the Local Enterprise Partnership will be critical in helping us

understand the issues and in supporting businesses through the **phases of the recovery**.

As an **anchor institution**, the council's decisions around employment, contractual and procurement activity can play an important role in supporting an inclusive local economy, alongside business facing services such as planning, regulation and enforcement. The Council will do all it can to play its part and to encourage other partner organisations to, e.g. think local as much as possible.

Developing a Town Investment Plan for Hastings

Work on developing a **Town Investment Plan** for the town - as part of the government's Towns Fund programme - is continuing. Through the programme the council, working alongside local partners, has an opportunity to access up to £25m in capital funding to support growth in Hastings. The government is asking that alignment to Covid 19 recovery be demonstrated in the Town Investment Plan and we will ensure join up where appropriate.

Key Actions:

- Work with partners such as Hastings BID and ESCC to support, review and implement appropriate Covid 19 safe measures in the town centre and other secondary retail areas to support social distancing and confidence in safe movement for customers and staff.
- Use licensing powers to support businesses – particularly those in the hospitality sector – where appropriate to vary the use of outside space, whilst ensuring that people with disabilities can move around the town safely.
- Pursue a holistic approach to reducing the incidence of antisocial behaviour exhibited by some of the street community, working with partners to address their addiction issues and robustly enforce where behaviour is anti-social or criminal.
- Continue to identify opportunities to promote sustainable travel in the town – with a focus on walking, cycling and other forms of sustainable travel as appropriate.
- Engage with business, representative groups and relevant public authorities, and monitor relevant data sources and emerging national and local analysis, to understand the challenges facing businesses and the wider economic impact.
- Reach out to as many groups and individuals covered by the Equalities Act 2010 Protected characteristics to maximise the opportunities for their contribution to developing, implementing and monitoring such a Plan.
- Work in partnership to develop appropriate solutions to the challenges identified, including through our planning, licensing and enforcement functions and by working with partners on issues including skills and pathways to work.
- Consider how the council's role as an anchor institution can support an inclusive economy through the use of council assets, contractual, recruitment and procurement levers.

- Develop and deliver a Town Investment Plan to get access to up to £25m Town Deal funding for investment in the town as well as lever in any further private investment or other government funding streams.
- Engage in wider recovery plans with partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership, East Sussex County Council and their emerging Economic Recovery Plan.

Theme 5: Housing, regeneration and development

Why it is important

Hastings continues a journey of improvement, the pace of which will continue to adapt and change in response to Covid 19 and the associated challenges outlined in this document. A new generation of entrepreneurs, investors and cultural institutions are creating new opportunities for residents. But there is still a way to go. Hastings, by virtue of its location, character and development opportunities, is **ripe for investment**. We want to deliver more high-quality homes and create new job and business opportunities – while **protecting what is special** about Hastings.

Through our Local Plan, planning policies and Capital Strategy we will support development that responds to the needs of existing and future residents and business and recognises that **well-designed environmentally sustainable development** can deliver positive returns over the longer term. This includes encouraging the design and use of buildings that create active, healthy places where people want to be. We want to **build on, not over**, the unique atmosphere and vibe of Hastings whilst continuing to celebrate our beautiful coastal setting and rich natural and built heritage.

The council has continued to see a **high demand** for its **homelessness** services over recent years, and this is expected to increase further during the recovery phase from coronavirus. This trend has a **significant resource implication** for the council and negatively affects the quality of life of vulnerable members of our community.

The main issue affecting homelessness is a **lack of affordable housing** options locally. Supply of new affordable housing has not kept pace with rising demand over recent years. Until now, the factors affecting the supply of affordable housing have been largely outside the council's control. However, the grant schemes offered by Homes England and changes to government policy encouraging development, improve the viability of the council intervening to provide additional units. There are also opportunities for the council to **work in partnership** with private and social housing developers to increase the supply of accommodation.

This will support our regeneration priorities for the town by ensuring we are making the **best use of our own land and resources** and improving the quality of housing stock.

Key actions:

- Restart vital housing and licensing inspections to ensure the backlog is cleared.
- Reintroduce services to let homes and reintroduce housing options policies.
- Support people in private sector rented accommodation taking action against sub-standard accommodation.
- Prepare, submit and implement the Town Investment Plan to maximise up to £25m of investment in the regeneration of Hastings.
- Make progress on the Hastings Local Plan to put in place a framework to guide development in the town and encourage it to be well designed and genuinely sustainable.
- Ensure that infrastructure to support growth is delivered in a timely manner, with delivery of affordable housing maximised, and planning powers used effectively to ensure delivery of priorities.
- Make the most of its own land holdings and financial capability to maximise rates of housing delivery through exemplary homes that meet the needs of the people of Hastings especially the most vulnerable and those whose job insecurity and low pay mean they are disproportionately affected by the shortage of genuinely affordable housing. The council will review and redevelop a pipeline of sites that can be delivered over the medium to long-term.

Theme 6: Tourism, Leisure, culture and heritage

Why it is important

Hastings is a vibrant, young and creative town, with a thriving **leisure and culture** offer and town centres that carefully mix the old and new. As a place that puts culture at the **heart of everything it does**, people in Hastings understand its power and take pride in living in such a town.

Tourism, leisure, culture and heritage are central to the town's vision for the future. The sector **creates jobs** and is fundamental to the **wellbeing of residents**, to the town's **attractiveness** as a place to live, invest or visit. Our museum and associated activities continue to serve as a hub for much council input into this sector.

As noted above, the visitor economy is worth around £360m to Hastings and supports over 6500 jobs in the town. 1066 Country marketing, the private/public sector tourism partnership is managed by HBC.

The sector has been greatly affected by Covid 19 with the closure of businesses, charities and organisations during the lockdown and the **cancellation of events**.

These will all continue to feel the impact of continued restrictions and social distancing requirements into the future.

The town also has a high proportion of **independent artists** and **creative practitioners** who make an important contribution to the cultural and community life of Hastings. Many of these individuals will be **self-employed** and the impact of Covid 19 on these groups – and the subsequent gaps this might leave in the town’s cultural ecology – will take some time to be realised.

The sector will be integral to the **recovery of the town**, not only for its economic impact, but as the opportunity to enjoy some arts, leisure and culture, albeit in a socially distant way, will be an important marker for many of a return to an element of **normality**.

It is likely that it will be some time before **major events** can re-start, but by working with partners to adapt to the new requirements around social distancing, our aim must be for leisure facilities, arts and culture to be available to all, safely, as soon as possible.

Key actions:

- Keep the Museum open as much as possible and open other attractions where we can afford to do so and arrive at solutions to reduce associated costs and potentially provide these services differently.
- Work with the arts, heritage and culture sector to enable the town’s institutions and events to re-open in a safe way when it is appropriate to do so.
- Engage with the sector to understand the issues facing them and seek solutions together, including working with national arts and culture organisations as required.
- Ensure that BAME artists and cultural workers are fully engaged and supported to access opportunities to develop their contributions to the town.
- Continue to work closely with local tourism businesses as the lockdown eases to understand emerging trends and support where we can in terms of Covid 19 resurgence.
- We will collaborate with the sector and other partners to seize the opportunity to reinvigorate our domestic tourism market where capacity and resources allow.
- Re-open the seaside cycle hire hut and support our leisure contractor to operate safe and hygienic leisure facilities
- Operate the Active Hastings programme with activities for all including a school holiday summer programme with health and community safety partners.
- Deliver externally funded Wayfinding project - introducing new and updating outdated visitor signposts across the town centre and seafront, improving opportunities to move around town on foot and by cycle.
- At the appropriate time, work to deliver council run events, including to celebrate the hard work of the town over this period, in line with social distancing requirements.

Theme 7: Climate change and the green economy

Why it is important

It has been noted that the pandemic is both a prefiguring of the **existential threat** posed by climate change and also an opportunity to **accelerate our collective response** to that threat.

As the council and the town looks towards recovery, there is an opportunity to build on these existing approaches through the council's **Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan** and by incorporating opportunities to support and extend the behavioural change that the pandemic has initiated, such as decreased road traffic.

The council also has the opportunity to use its ongoing **place-making activity** to support recovery to drive growth in the local **green economy**. This could be taken forward by, for example, encouraging and supporting sustainable travel infrastructure and enhancing biodiversity of council assets, parks and open spaces. This could also include identifying further opportunities to **reduce waste** and **enhance the circular economy** locally.

One significant opportunity is to deploy the council's investment in **house building** and **maintenance** in ways that will stimulate the local green economy, for example incentivising the development of a local supply of labour in construction and manual trades that will both help in decarbonising the economy and produce local economic multipliers. As part of its plans, the council will also explore opportunities and revisit the business case for **solar panels on council assets**.

Key actions:

- Ensure that the council's Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan (with input from stakeholders) includes reference to opportunities emerging from the crisis and articulates environmental objectives during the recovery phase.
- Undertake an 'opportunity audit' across the council's activities and assets to identify and prioritise specific opportunities to delivery quantifiable environmental benefits, to supplement the Climate Change Strategy.
- Consider opportunities to further promote sustainable travel in the town.
- Work to ensure that future housing and regeneration schemes are subject to the highest possible environmental standards.
- Consider opportunities to further promote sustainable travel in the town, including DESTI SMART- working with 10 European partners on developing an action plan for sustainable seafront transport options.
- Work to ensure that future housing and regeneration schemes are subject to the highest possible environmental standards.

- Ensure new developments are built to low carbon standards and factor key issues around resilience.
- Restore, protect and rewild and enhance the towns natural spaces to help tackle the climate emergency.

Theme 8: Harnessing social capital

Why it is important

Through the current crisis, the role of **neighbours** and **local community support** has become vital both in terms of providing support to the vulnerable and as a way to **engage residents in their community**.

Residents need to have trust in their local community and the council has an important role to play – which it must step up to – in trusting communities to **lead the response** to challenges in their neighbourhoods.

In the aftermath of the Covid 19 crisis, the council, in its community enabling role, will need to avoid bureaucracy in order to **allow communities to grow** and work in a more organic way. If the council does not change the way it engages communities at the **grassroots level**, there is a risk that the interventions it makes could be counter-productive in terms of negating the growing **community spirit** and neighbourliness that has developed in response to Covid 19.

By enabling **resident-led solutions to local challenges**, such initiatives inspire others. The way in which the council adapts and develops its communication mechanisms with communities will be key in creating a positive narrative where **community participation** and **building of social capital** is the norm.

The impact of Covid19 on the **voluntary and community sector** will be severe and long lasting. The council will need to support the sector to identify the **gaps in services** and support the development of existing groups into those gaps or new charities.

It will be vital for the council to look to its own role in supporting the sector through supporting the Foreshore Trust **grants programme** but also through its **procurement processes** in order to ensure that they are accessible to the voluntary and community sector and promote social value and local purchasing.

The number of people from all our communities **volunteering** across Hastings to support the most vulnerable has been a highlight of the response phase and it will be important to harness this social capital and identify how people can volunteer to support the town's recovery.

Key actions:

- Work with residents to understand the level of support needed from the council without imposing unnecessary process and allowing communities to define their own local priorities and responses to local challenges.
- Support the voluntary and community sector in adapting and use its procurement powers and grants based on gaps and need.
- Develop communications strategies which both amplify inspiring stories and create two-way conversations to inform council decision making.
- Operate the Active Hastings volunteer 'Spice' project in collaboration with Brighton and Sussex Medical School to bring volunteers together to help communities become healthier and continue the workforce development project to support local sport and physical activity instructors.
- Working with partners to harness the volunteer spirit shown as a consequence of the initial Covid 19 outbreak to support our most vulnerable and be part of involving these active citizens in making and keeping the town a great and welcoming place for all.