

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Overview of the Council's Approach to Recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic

Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Alan McDermott – Leader of the Council
Lead Director	William Benson – Chief Executive
Head of Service	William Benson – Chief Executive
Lead Officer/Author	William Benson – Chief Executive
Classification	Public document (Non-exempt)
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:

1. That the report be noted.

Explain how this report relates to the Corporate Priorities in the Five-Year Plan:

The report supports delivery of the Council's Five-Year Plan through the delivery of a safe, sustainable, managed recovery in both community and economic across the borough from the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic.

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Covid-19 Panel	26 May 2020
Agreed for publication by Portfolio Holder	29 May 2020
Agreed for publication by Head of Service	29 May 2020
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	08 June 2020
Cabinet	25 June 2020

Overview of the Council's approach to Recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an overall summary of the proposed approach to the recovery phase to the Covid-19 pandemic for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. It emphasises the importance of a safe, sustainable, managed recovery, sets out some overarching objectives and a proposes structure for the response phase of the crisis.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A unique recovery

- 2.1 In 'normal' emergencies, local authorities and local resilience forums deal first with an emergency and then the Recovery – getting back to 'business as usual' (for example, when the flood waters recede, work takes place to repair any damage and to get people back into their homes). The Recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic will be unlike any other in our lifetimes. The crisis has gone on for longer, been more extreme and will have more profound consequences than anything we have prepared for before. We will also be simultaneously working on Recovery in tandem with the Response phase and have the potential to return to Response at any time if there is a second wave of infections. There is also the likelihood that the Recovery will span other Emergency Planning events including the end of the Brexit Transition Phase and that for much of it, staff and partners will be working remotely. Finally, the sheer scale and breadth of the social and economic impacts means that the we will be entering uncharted territory and it is highly unlikely that wherever we end up won't look like 'Business as Usual'.
- 2.2 As mentioned in the earlier paper summarising the Council's Response to the Pandemic, the Council works alongside a number of other bodies within the 'Kent Resilience Forum' (KRF) to coordinate our response to emergencies and to manage our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act. Government guidance states that recovery should be co-ordinated by a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) within local resilience forums.

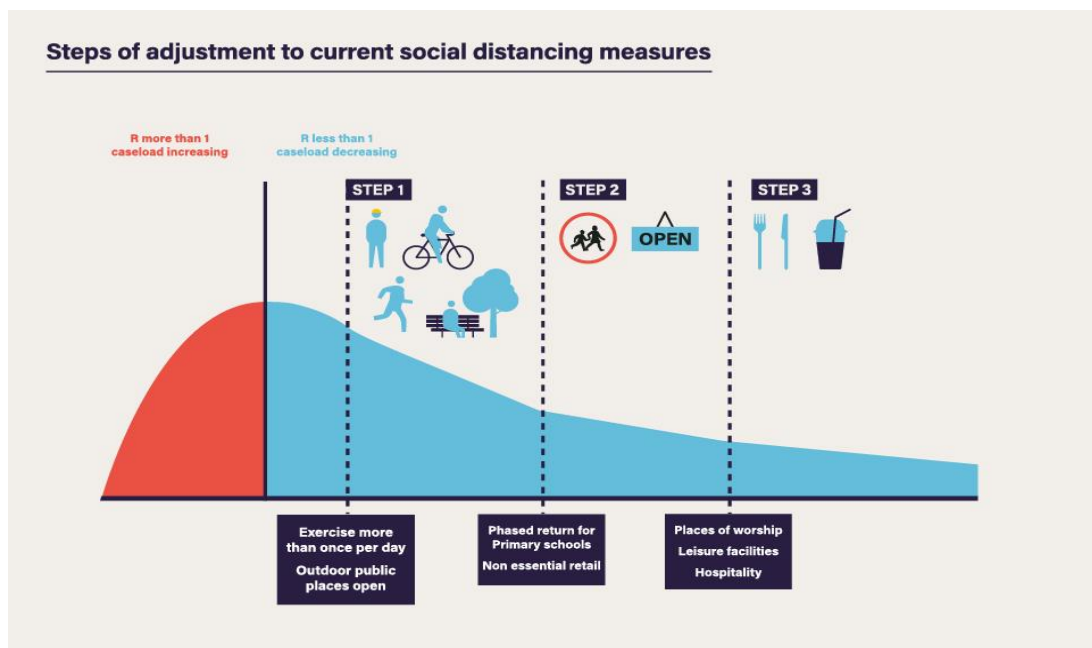
Recent events

- 2.3 On 10 May the Prime Minister set out the overarching approach for the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. That approach has been outlined in greater detail through a 50-page recovery strategy (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_1_10520_v2_WEB_1_.pdf) and through various additional documents setting

out guidance for travel to work, educational settings, shielding the vulnerable and reactive measures to control infection (as well as a range of other issues).

2.4 The guidance also contains a 'Covid alert level' system and a series of steps to lift the restrictions. Details are provided in a separate paper elsewhere on the agenda. The Government has also issued additional guidance on areas including safe working procedures, public transport and schools. It set out three steps with planning dates along with associated steps to lift restrictions:

- 13 May 2020 Step 1
- 1 June 2020 Step 2
- 4 July 2020 Step 3



2.5 Step 1 is to involve the following:

Work

- continue to work from home wherever possible
- Sectors of the economy that should be open - food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics, distribution and scientific research in laboratories.
- But not hospitality and non-essential retail

Travel

- avoid public transport
- cycle, walk or drive

Public spaces and recreation

- angling and tennis
- Not playgrounds, outdoor gyms or ticketed outdoor leisure venues
- People may drive to outdoor open spaces irrespective of distance
- Protecting the clinically vulnerable

Enforcement

- more stringent enforcement measures for non-compliance

Other areas outlined include Parliament and International Travel.

2.6 Step 2 is to involve the following (no earlier than Monday 1 June and only if the five tests have been met:

- A phased return for early years settings and schools
- Opening non-essential retail
- Permitting cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed doors
- Re-opening more local public transport in urban areas, subject to strict measures
- Social and family contact.

2.7 Step 3 was outlined as including (no earlier than 4 July):

- Personal care (such as hairdressers and beauty salons)
- Hospitality (such as food service providers, pubs and accommodation),
- Public places (such as places of worship)
- Leisure facilities (like cinemas)

2.8 On 28 May, the Prime Minister announced that the Government's five tests for easing restrictions had been met and that, as a result, primary schools would open for some classes, secondary schools would start to provide some face-to-face contact for years 10 and 12, that outdoor retail and car showrooms could re-open from 1 June and other non-essential retailers from 15 June and that some restrictions on meeting people would be lifted with up to six people being able to meet in parks and private outdoor spaces. Further restrictions have been lifted including, most recently (at the time of this report being written!!!) the ability for the 'Shielded' population to meet one other person.

2.9 It is clear that we will remain in a fluid, dynamic, fast-moving situation where announcements will frequently pre-empt detailed guidance and where there can be differences between 'guidance' and legislative regulations that have the force of the law behind them. We need to be ready to respond to changes in direction at short notice and also, potentially, for restrictions to be re-imposed.

3. TWBC OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Our objective is to deliver a safe, sustainable, managed recovery, sets out some overarching objectives and a proposes structure for the response phase of the crisis. At a meeting of the Council's Covid-19 Panel, the following principles were agreed for consideration and approval by Cabinet:

- To support local businesses return to operation and to survive one of the most challenging economic times in our lifetime.
- To support local residents who have been affected by the Pandemic and the restrictions placed upon them and to manage the transition as protections and support mechanisms are removed.
- To protect the health and safety of staff and councillors delivering essential public services to our residents and businesses.
- To maintain and prioritise (where necessary) the Council's services in line with government advice.

- To retain the capacity to protect the vulnerable and to react to any move back into response mode if necessary.
- To recognise and promote positive outcomes including reduced traffic and pollution, better work/life balance, community spirit reduced traffic/congestion.
- To recognise that the Council needs to remain financially solvent and that, with government grant completely removed and Council Tax capped (and us retaining 10p in the pound) we are reliant on income and there remains the possibility of a tension between this and other objectives.

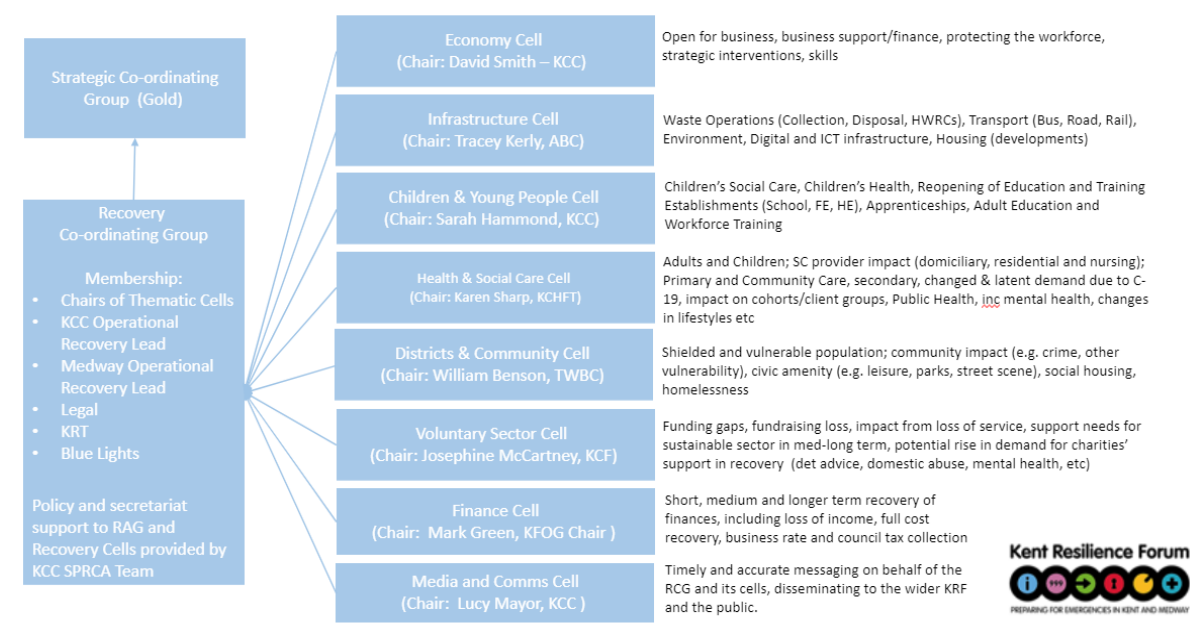
4. STRUCTURES AND REPORTING

4.1 From the outset, the Council has established a ‘Gold’ group to provide strategic management of its operations and a ‘Silver’ group to provide a tactical response and to coordinate the activities of the various Council departments. Two sub-groups were subsequently established focusing on the community impact of the pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on local businesses.

County-wide structures

4.2 As mentioned above, the Council is operating within and coordinating its response with a county-wide Recovery Structure. A Recovery Coordinating Group has been set up within the Kent Resilience Forum based on national guidance and with expert advice being provided from the Kent Resilience Team.

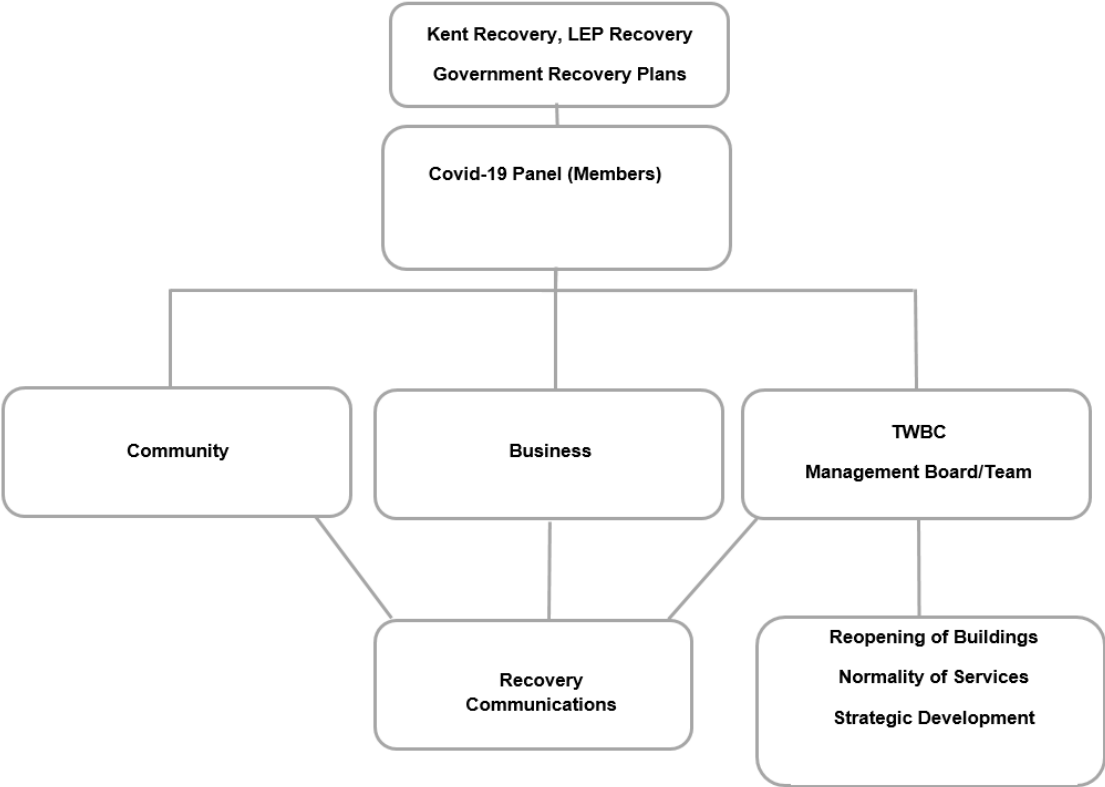
4.3 This Recovery Coordinating Group (RCG) is supported by seven recovery ‘cells’. The Council is directly involved in some of these cells and indirectly involved in others through regular reports to the RCG, Kent Leaders and Chief Executives and county-wide professional officer groupings. Details of this structure are set out below.



4.4 In total, 145 people representing 55 organisations are involved in this process with public sector bodies, business representatives and voluntary and community sector organisations all involved. Each ‘cell’ is in the process of producing an impact assessment which set out the impact of the pandemic on the area of focus, strengths, risks, weaknesses and opportunities that have been identified through the Response phase and into the Recovery phase and a prioritised list of impacts and activity. The RCG enables key themes to be drawn out from the work of the various cells and it also works in collaboration with other recovery groups from across the South East to ensure that we can learn from best practice and collaboratively press on key issues with central government.

TWBC structures

4.5 The Council is proposing to use the structure set out below for overseeing the Recovery in Tunbridge Wells. We are proposing to maintain the existing teams leading on Community and Business issues and to use the Council’s existing Management Team/Board structures to assess the impact on the Council’s operations, finances and plans for the future. This work will be overseen by and guided by a Covid-19 Panel – an informal member panel set up to ensure that there are inclusive arrangements in place to steer and advise on the Council’s approach. The Panel includes members of the Cabinet, two representatives of each of the Council’s political groups the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and representatives of KCC, KALC (parish and town councils), The Town Forum, the Citizens’ Advice Bureau and business (the Federation of Small Business and Royal Tunbridge Wells Together).



- 4.6 In addition, regular reports will be made to Overview and Scrutiny and to Cabinet giving all councillors and members of the public opportunities to speak, ask questions and provide views. The Council has also instituted a range of other measures to ensure that councillors are informed and involved including regular (virtual) meetings with Group Leaders, meetings with the Chief Executive and political groups, weekly bulletins/updates from the Council, daily updates from the Local Government Association and regular Member briefings on key Covid-19-related issues with an opportunity for councillors to ask any questions about anything they want.
- 4.7 More detailed reports will be provided within the three key areas outlined above (Business, Community, Council) in due course but the following section provides a summary of the issues we are looking at.
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5. BUSINESSES AND THE ECONOMY

- 5.1 The Council set up a group to oversee support to businesses from a very early stage. As set out in the accompanying report on the Council's response to the Pandemic, we have taken steps such as supporting an advice line through the Kent and Medway Growth Hub (that has helped over 500 local businesses) and we have distributed over 1,800 grants to local businesses worth over £25m.
- 5.2 The immediate focus of the Council is both on publicising and paying the new round of discretionary Business Rates grants and on the re-opening of non-essential shops in high streets across the Borough from 15 June. The government has permitted outdoor markets and car showrooms to open from 1 June and other non-essential retail premises that are Covid-19 safe to open from 15 June.
- 5.3 We know that many more town centre businesses are planning for 15 June re-opening in line with Government Guidance. We have been in detailed discussions for some while with the BID (Royal Tunbridge Wells Together) and Royal Victoria Place in Royal Tunbridge Wells and with parish and town councils to discuss arrangements in other towns and villages. Our working assumption is that footfall may well be high as evidenced by those premises that have remained open for food and household essentials and other premises (such as garden centres) that have recently re-opened. We also understand that many retailers will be holding sales. Experience has also shown that it is vitally important that visitors feel safe and are given clear guidance on what to expect and how to observe social distancing rules.
- 5.4 Royal Victoria Place has developed a detailed re-opening strategy and the BID has produced a re-opening guide. Issues highlighted in discussions with town centre businesses (and parishes) to date have included:
- Journeys to work for employees
 - Staggered opening times for shops
 - Encouraging businesses to provide hand sanitizer in store
 - Queuing space, management and etiquette (e.g. keeping within shop frontage, queuing to the left) – possible role for additional street marshals
 - Availability of public toilets (many shops/cafes will not be opening facilities)

- Street furniture and street cleansing
 - Additional outdoor trading and outdoor eating and drinking
 - Possible reallocation of road space for pedestrians and cycling
 - Requirement for licensing changes
 - Safety & Security issues
 - Need for temporary signage re social distancing
 - Promotion & Marketing of re-opened businesses
- 5.5 Perhaps the most important message we have heard from shops that have been open throughout the 'lockdown' is the importance of visitors feeling safe and for clear messaging and guidance on social distancing.
- 5.6 The RTWT BID has designed and produced a re-opening kit which has been extremely popular with businesses and we have produced a similar kit for use by parish and town councils and thousands of items have been ordered.
- 5.7 The Council has put together a draft re-opening plan for town and village centres across the Borough which is attached as an appendix. It deals with a range of issues including:
- The management of high streets and social distancing including the use of marshals
 - Signage and equipment to promote social distancing and aid queueing
 - Street cleansing
 - Parking
 - Traffic and pedestrian management (discussed in further detail below)
 - Public transport
 - Public toilets
 - Promotion, marketing and signposting
 - Monitoring

Traffic and pedestrian management

- 5.8 On 9 May, the Government announced the establishment of a £250m 'emergency active-travel fund' to design and implement 'pop-up' and temporary interventions to create an environment that is safe for walking and cycling to help maintain social distancing and avoid overcrowding on public transport systems. Details of the funding were subsequently announced on 27 May skewed towards areas with high levels of public transport use and with a clear view that the funding should be used to meaningfully alter the status quo with work starting within four weeks of receiving funding and being complete within eight weeks. Kent County Council has received £8m of which 20 per cent (£1.6m) is to be allocated in the first instance. Bids must be received by Friday 5 June. KCC has emphasised that it will be guided by the guidance and also by the ability of local authorities to deliver the scheme (and to support them with capacity to deliver it) and by whether or not the schemes are supported locally. Details of the schemes have been discussed with the political group leaders and with the Covid-19 Panel and a letter of support has been agreed by all political group leaders, the Chairman of the Town Forum and the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Business Improvement District. Details of the schemes

which we intend to submit are set out below (though this will be subject to a discussion at the Covid-19 Panel).

Location	Proposed Intervention
Grosvenor Road (RTW town centre)	Reallocation of carriageway space to pedestrians/queues on western side (near Tesco) Plus 20 mph limit
Camden Road (RTW town centre)	One-way northbound between Calverley Road and Garden Road or modal filter at Calverley Road junction to allow pavement widening Plus 20mph limit
High Street (RTW town centre)	One-way operation in southbound direction to allow pavement widening Plus 20mph limit
Major Yorks Road (RTW town centre)	Pop up cycle route (westbound – uphill), removal of car parking bays
Reynolds Lane (Southborough)	Modal Filter or access only signage to allow safer walking and cycling
Grosvenor Bridge at junction with Upper Grosvenor Road	Modal Filter to provide safer walking and cycling into town centre
A26 Cycle Route	Removal of remaining parking spaces on route in St Johns and Southborough Modal filters on roads adjacent to A26 e.g. East Cliff Road (also starts LTN in St John’s area). Detail to follow. Upgrade all the waiting restrictions to double yellow lines and introduce a peak hour loading ban too This is an LCWIP scheme and we are already working on improvements to the route with KCC.
Commercial Road, Paddock Wood	One-way northbound to allow for pavement widening for pedestrians
20mph restrictions in town centres in conjunction with above schemes	Across all the town centres to support measures above (part of package) to allow safer cycling and walking LCWIP measure
Nevill Street	Road closure and removal of guard railing A Phase 2 scheme that requires further consideration

6. COMMUNITIES

- 6.1 The Focus of the Council's work on Community issues to date has been on the establishment of a 'Community Hub' to assist with the distribution of food and household essentials to shielded, vulnerable and isolated residents, the establishment of a 7-day-a-week helpline (both within the Council's contact centre and with KCC's #KentTogether helpline, contacting and supporting 'Shielded residents', identifying and assisting other vulnerable and isolated individuals, working with parish and town councils, the voluntary and community sector organisations and volunteers, combating social isolation and promoting wellbeing and supporting the voluntary and community sector.
 - 6.2 As we move to Recover, there will be a continued need to support, Shielded, vulnerable and isolated residents, a potential requirement to support those isolating as a result of the test and trace programme, addressing and responding to the impact of the Pandemic and associated lockdown on issues such as domestic abuse, mental health, unemployment etc and managing the removal of protections (such as evictions, debt, utilities, employment etc). There will clearly be a longer-term impact on inequality (education, health, financial, digital).
 - 6.3 Other issues to be explored as part of the 'Community' dimension to the Recovery will include the impact on the voluntary and community sector (resource, demand, fatigue), the need to accommodate those in temporary accommodation as a result of the Pandemic and any consequential impact of the financial downturn on housing and homelessness, potential community tensions as society/town centres unlock and the sustainability of sports, leisure, culture and arts organisations given the lack of support from the DCMS to date.
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7. IMPACT ON TWBC AND THE WIDER BOROUGH

Council facilities, services and staff

- 7.1 Recent changes to government guidance do not impact on the majority of our services and they will continue to operate much as they are at present. The theatre, sports centres and community centres will remain closed and existing social distancing measures will remain in place at the Gateway and Crematorium.
- 7.2 In terms of parks and open spaces, we have opened up appropriate outdoor spaces including tennis courts, bowling greens and MUGAs but not playgrounds or outdoor gyms in line with government guidance. Public toilets have remained open throughout and will continue to do so. We have amended our signage to be in line with government advice.
- 7.3 We have not reduced in any way our Planning or Building Control functions and they continue to operate (albeit with some changes to working practices. We will also manage other services that require an interaction with residents or businesses (e.g. Licensing and Environmental Health) in line with government guidance and advice.

- 7.4 The Town Hall has remained open throughout but, in line with government guidance, we have said that staff who can work from home must work from home. In practice, this has meant a very limited number of staff working in the Town Hall (largely the Facilities Team who have ensured that it remains available as the Council's base for responding to any other emergencies or incidents). For the foreseeable future we will continue to encourage people to work from home but we are aware that some people struggle to do so (for a variety of practical and other reasons) and that some people are limited in the amount they can do without access to the Town Hall. Because of this, we are making preparations to allow a limited number of staff to return to the Town Hall but it will in all likelihood be some time before it is open to the public or other use uses (such as the Court or public meetings).
- 7.5 The majority of our contracted services will continue to operate as at the present time. Urbaser and Sodexo who operate our waste and street cleansing and parks and grounds maintenance contracts are working as normal but it is unlikely that the Leisure Centre will open until, at the earliest, Step 3 of the Government's recovery strategy. We will keep all contracted services under review and provide advice and guidance as necessary. Whilst work on a number of our key corporate projects has stopped, work continues on The Amelia Scott, Public Realm Phase 2 and the Southborough Hub.

Finance

- 7.6 The Covid-19 Pandemic has, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the Council's finances. Full details are set out in a report elsewhere on this agenda.

Council strategies, projects and priorities

- 7.7 Prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council was looking to start work on re-visiting and re-working its vision and ambitions. This work was placed on hold during the Response phase of the pandemic but it is clear that the operating environment in which we will be working for the foreseeable future will be considerably changed. There is also very little clarity on the likely state of the Council's finances and therefore its ability to maintain services and deliver on projects. Clearly, we need to start work on looking to the future but perhaps our first priority should be to put together an interim Plan/Strategy to get us through the initial Response phase of the pandemic whilst working up priorities for the longer-term.
- 7.8 The Council has also redeployed a number of staff (approximately 20 per cent) to help manage the response to the Pandemic and is making plans to redeploy them to their substantive roles.
- 7.9 The Council was on the cusp of agreeing the Community Safety Partnership Plan. It has been reviewed and amended to take account of the pandemic including a greater emphasis on issues such as Domestic Abuse. Other plans and strategies will almost certainly need reviewing including the Council's Economic Development Strategy, Cultural Strategy, Medium-Term Financial

Strategy and the Council's plans and strategies for its workforce, ICT services, facilities and transformation.

7.10 The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the Council's projects. The completion of the Public Realm works has been delayed; work also had to stop briefly on the Southborough Hub because of lack of materials; work on The Amelia Scott has proceeded because we re-shuffled the programme, but it is likely to lead to an increase in cost and may affect our prospects of raising income through fundraising. The carbon audit has also been delayed.

Engagement

7.11 The Council has engaged proactively with politicians, staff, businesses, residents, partners and stakeholders. Going forward, we will need to ensure that this continues and that we develop new ways of engaging with residents, businesses and partners that recognise the restrictions on public meetings.

Working with other partners

7.12 The initial 'response' phase of the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of working with partners. We enjoy very strong relationships with partners because of the efforts we have put into working with them and supporting them to deliver their services. We will look go build on this going forward.

Other thoughts

7.13 It seems likely that the Council will have some role to play in both enforcement and contact tracing. We are seeking further clarification on the nature and extent of this role and are giving thought as to how it can be resourced.

7.14 Finally, as was noted in the accompanying report, it is worth noting that whilst there have been some appalling consequences of the pandemic for many businesses, individuals, families and organisations, there have also been some positive outcomes – the power of the community response to the pandemic, the strong working relationships that we have forged with partners, the reduction in carbon emissions and a requirement to develop new ways of working and getting about. We need to ensure that we capture and promote the good points as well as mitigating and responding to the awful consequences of the crisis.

8. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

8.1 This report is for information.

9. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That the report be noted.

10. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

10.1 The Covid-19 Panel received a summarised version of this update at its meeting on 26 May 2020.

10.2 As the report is for information it is not subject to consultation.

11. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

11.1 This paper is an introductory paper setting out high level issues, objectives, principles and structures for overseeing the Recovery phase of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

11.2 Further reports, briefings and updates will be given to Members at the regular Friday briefings, meetings of the Covid-19 Panel and formal meetings of Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet.

11.3 Details of our plans for re-opening the town centre will be communicated to businesses, residents, visitors and representative groups (details are provided in the appendix).

11.4 Moving forwards, councillors, businesses, residents and partners will be involved in shaping our plans and strategies as they are changed and updated to reflect the realities of our operating environment and to set out our ambitions for the future.

12. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Legal including Human Rights Act	None identified – the Council will continue to respond to and operate within government guidance and legislation	Report author
Finance and other resources	The Covid-19 Pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council's financial position. Further details are provided in a report elsewhere on this agenda.	Report author
Staffing establishment	There are no additional staffing requirements as a result of this report. However, it should be noted that staff are and will be continue to be redeployed to address the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Depending on the extent to which the government recognises the financial challenges we are facing, the Pandemic has the potential to impact on future staffing levels. Staff working	Report author

	arrangements have changed significantly and are likely to remain changed for some time to come. In light of our experience, there is likely to be long-term changes to the way in which we work.	
Risk Management	The Council has updated its Strategic Risk Register to take account of the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic including a new risk specifically to address the issues it poses.	Report author
Data Protection	None identified	Report author
Environment and Sustainability	The Pandemic has had a positive impact on the environment with global greenhouse gas emissions falling by 17 per cent in early April. For the Borough, travel and community has dropped significantly and the report sets out ways in which we are exploring how to take this forward into the future.	Report author
Community Safety	The Covid-19 Pandemic has had significant implications for community safety. The report sets out that the Council will be looking to amend the Community Safety Partnership Plan in light of these changes and challenges and we will continue to assess this through the Council's recovery structures set out within the report.	Report author
Health and Safety	None identified	Report author
Health and Wellbeing	The Covid-19 Pandemic has clearly had enormous consequences for the health and wellbeing of residents. These will be monitored and addressed through the Recovery structures set out within the report.	Report author
Equalities	There are no consequences of this report in terms of the Equality Act but the Pandemic will have significant long-term implications for equality. These are set out in brief in the report and will continue to be monitored as part of the Recovery programme.	Report author

13. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with, and form part of, the report:

- Draft Reopening High Streets/Town Centres Action Plan
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14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- There is a huge amount of advice and guidance on the .gov.uk website