

Setting the Course

Kent County Council's Interim Strategic Plan

December 2020



Contents

To be added in designed version

Foreword

In March this year the council was ready to adopt its new 5 Year Plan '*Kent's Future – Our Priority*' - a strategic plan developed over many months in consultation with the public, our partners and our staff which set out our commitment to make Kent the best place to live, work, play, learn and invest in.

That plan was never adopted. The County Council meeting in March was cancelled as the first COVID-19 national lockdown began. As we worked with our partners to support Kent's immediate response to the pandemic, it became clear that COVID-19 would leave a huge social and economic legacy long after it has ended and that any plan would have to take account of that.

We accepted that a post COVID-19 strategic plan would be required and postponed work on our 5 Year Plan. But we are still living in uncertain times. Trying to plan ahead too far into the long-term is unrealistic when so much can change so quickly. In a few short weeks while this plan was in its final stages, the level of COVID-19 infections within the county rose dramatically and a second round of national restrictions was announced, but the availability of an effective vaccine, with all its longer-term implications, also became a stronger possibility. Nonetheless, there is still a need to provide a framework against which the council will support our residents, businesses, service users and local communities to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more sustainable than before.

This Interim Strategic Plan explains the immediate challenges we face and the actions we will prioritise to lead Kent through the next 18 months. These actions will in many cases be the groundwork for longer-term change. The Plan sets out the challenges and vital opportunities we will focus on addressing to support the county to recover, build resilience and reset.

We are not starting from a blank page. The views, experiences and suggestions we heard during our 5 Year Plan consultation have informed the priorities we have set. People told us that their quality of life is greatly impacted by things like how easy it is to travel around the county, how well looked-after their local area is and how safe it feels. These day to day experiences make a big difference. And they will make a bigger difference in a post-COVID-19 world where people work more from home, commute less and invest more time in their local neighbourhoods and communities.

How we will respond to the long-term structural opportunities emerging from COVID-19 will be central to a new 5 Year Plan which we will begin developing in the latter half of 2021. Once again, we will develop that long-term strategic plan through listening to and engaging with the residents and businesses of Kent that we serve.

Roger Gough
Leader of the Council

Background and context

This Interim Strategic Plan has been developed during a time of significant and continuous change and uncertainty for our county. The COVID-19 crisis has affected virtually all aspects of life and its impact will continue to be felt for months and years to come. Individuals, families, businesses and community groups are all feeling the strain and some of the most vulnerable people have been affected the most. Through these difficult times, people in Kent have shown incredible strength in quickly adapting to new ways of doing things, keeping in touch and supporting each other.

From the start of the crisis, Kent County Council (KCC) has taken emergency action to protect the safety and wellbeing of Kent residents. With our partners we launched Kent Together which has so far taken over 7,000 requests to provide urgent help and supplies to vulnerable people. We have made additional payments to care homes to help them cope and have bulk bought personal protective equipment (PPE) for key workers. We have found new ways to deliver our services including online support and activities for young people and adults with learning disabilities. Our Public Health teams are continuing to provide expert advice to help people protect their health. We have safely adapted and reopened the services we can, including Household Waste Sites and some of our libraries. Working with our partners, we have set up an emergency helpline for businesses which we have funded to continue to the end of the year and established an Employment Task Force.

The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the economic downturn it has created will have a significant impact on demand for our services and on the budget we have available. Demand for some services continues to rise each year due to changes in our population, but new pressures from the crisis will add to this. We are also seeing a big reduction in our income as the money we usually collect from Council Tax and Business Rate collection falls. We have received some additional grants from Government, and we are continuing to stand up for Kent's interests and seek further essential financial support and clarity on future funding so we can plan ahead.

During this challenging time, we have also seen great strengths and opportunities for the future. All over the county, people have stepped up to help those in need and look out for their family, friends and neighbours. Public sector and community services have worked more closely together than ever before to find ways to continue supporting those that rely on them, thinking innovatively through the challenges. Some of the new ways of doing things have proven to work well and have demonstrated how we can make improvements to the way we deliver our services. KCC's staff are always our greatest asset and it is important that we acknowledge and thank them for their ongoing hard work, dedication and resilience.

The COVID-19 crisis is not the only factor affecting Kent in the near future. Our geographical position as the gateway to the UK means that the transition from the European Union will have a greater impact on us than other parts of the country. Our preparations are driven by the twin objectives of minimising disruption to local communities and keeping the county open for business.

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Our joint planning with partners is as robust as it can be against a continuously evolving landscape, and there are still various strands of work to be delivered which are dependent on Government decisions and actions. Our proximity to London has also always had a big impact on the county and can be an advantage to attract investment and connect people to the opportunities that the capital offers. The changes in working and living patterns caused by COVID-19 may provide new advantages for our county.

The next 18 months will undoubtedly be a challenging time for Kent, but there are also exciting and unique opportunities available to improve the services we provide and accelerate the county's success and prosperity in the future. Our primary and overriding priority now is to balance our budget for 2021/22. The council has a significant number of statutory duties placed upon it and the requirement to balance the budget is pre-eminent. Without a balanced budget we will not be in a position to provide the vital services that our residents rely upon, nor will we be able to position the council and our services to be sustainable in the medium term.

We must take difficult decisions in the short-term to balance our budget and continue to protect and support people who are vulnerable and in need. While we do this, we will continue to lay the foundations for what is best for Kent in the longer-term. This means we will continue to attract investment into the county and seek to maintain valued universal services that make a big difference to quality of life. We will also seize opportunities available to us now so we can benefit from positive changes in years to come. The diagram below explains how we will balance these factors to navigate the county through the next 18 months. The priority actions set out in this Interim Strategic Plan aim to achieve this balance.

We will have to take hard decisions to address the budget position, while maintaining a longer-term view ●

There are important and unique opportunities that we must act on now to embed positive change for the future ●



● We will need to deliver change to implement the hard decisions and ensure our services are sustainable






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Delivering change in an organisation as large and as complex as KCC is difficult and it is essential that we take our service users, residents, staff, partners and providers with us. In July 2020, the County Council agreed to the creation of the Strategic Reset Programme to design and deliver a cohesive, modern public service offer for all Kent's residents, businesses and communities. This will bring together change projects consistently across the council and create opportunities to transform the way we work, including our people, assets, technology, structures and service delivery. The delivery of many of the priorities in this plan will be through the Strategic Reset Programme.

The challenges we face

This Interim Strategic Plan sets out the five main challenges that KCC is facing over the next 18 months, and what we will do to help address them. Within the challenges there are also important and unique opportunities to improve the way we do things.

The Five Challenges

	Financial Challenge	KCC is facing a significant budget gap and difficult decisions to make in the short-to medium-term, while maintaining a longer-term view of what is best for the county
	Economic Challenge	The economic downturn caused by COVID-19 is causing widespread economic impacts, while attracting investment and putting infrastructure in place to support growth remains a priority
	Demand Challenge	There is increasing demand for some of KCC's key services, which will be exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19 on Kent's residents, particularly those that are vulnerable
	Partnership Challenge	The crisis presents important opportunities to build on strengthened relationships and rethink how KCC works with partners to better manage demand and improve efficiency
	Environmental Challenge	Tackling the climate emergency and protecting the natural environment continues to be an urgent priority, as well as investing in the built environment and creating communities to be proud of

The next sections explain why it is important that we focus on these challenges and the priority actions we will take to help address them.



Financial challenge

Why it matters

We are facing the greatest financial challenge in recent years. Despite the pressures of the COVID-19 crisis, we have ensured a balanced budget for the year to March 2021 through one-off funding sources and savings. However, the biggest financial challenge is still ahead of us. At the start of our budget consultation in October 2020, we estimated that we could need to find between £62-143 million from spending reductions and savings during 2021-22, although the outcome will depend on the scale of Government financial support. This is more than we have had to find in a single year through any of the last ten years of austerity.

One side of the challenge is that our income is expected to be reduced. The funding we receive from Council Tax and Business Rates usually covers around half of our annual spending and we are already seeing reductions in how much is collected. Grants from Government also make up a large proportion of our budget and we are continuing to make the case for further funding, as well as lobbying to address long-standing funding gaps. The other side of the challenge is that demand for services including Public Health and children's and adults' social care is increasing. We will also need to take a range of actions to support businesses, communities and families to cope and recover, building their resilience for the future.

All of this means that we have some extremely difficult decisions ahead, including on possible spending reductions. At the same time, we must continue to plan for and invest in the county's future. To manage the multiple demands on our budget, we will need to be clear and focused on our priorities so that every penny spent makes the greatest difference. To help us do this, we will need to improve our financial management so that we can get a more detailed understanding of how the money we spend leads to positive outcomes, particularly in areas where we have discretion around what we provide. We will also continue to pursue ways to serve the people of Kent more effectively to save money where we can.

Given the pressures we now face and the efficiency savings we have already delivered over recent years, we will need to go further and make fundamental changes to the way we operate. Through our Strategic Reset Programme, we are bringing together the major change projects which are critical to help shape the future of the council. The programme will ensure our operating framework is fit for the future and can respond to the challenges and opportunities set out in the Interim Strategic Plan.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that new ways of delivering services can be more efficient and better for the people who use them. Many of our services have used digital technology to continue providing services to customers including through video conferencing and online transactions. Many people

have found this to be a more easy and convenient way to work with us, although we will always strive to provide face to face service where this is needed. We must be ready to make use of advances in technology as they evolve. Our staff have also shown great adaptability in adjusting to working from home as much as possible and this presents an opportunity to accelerate changes to how we use our buildings, while supporting staff wellbeing and productivity.

Priority actions to help address the financial challenge

Deliver a balanced budget and develop a sustainable medium-term financial plan

- Use evidence and resident feedback to take difficult decisions to find the necessary savings for the 2021/22 budget, while maintaining a longer-term view on our priorities and ambitions for the county. These will be developed in our new 5 Year Plan during 2021 in consultation with residents.
- Over the medium-term, deliver the Strategic Reset Programme to improve our efficiency and the quality of experience for service-users, residents and staff.
- Learn from other Local Authorities where the spend is lower and they achieve similar outcomes to Kent.
- Review our capital strategy and deliver a sustainable 10-year capital programme that reflects our strategic priorities, so we invest in the right infrastructure for the future, including highways, economic development and technology.

Stand up for Kent's residents

- Continue to work closely with Government to ensure Kent receives full funding to meet the county's needs, including where there are specific and unique pressures on the council, such as:
- Additional funding needed to cover the costs and lost income due to COVID-19, working with Kent Districts and other public service partners.
- Adequate funding to cover the impact and additional costs of EU transition for Kent, including the impact on our communities and businesses.
- Historic costs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children coming into the UK through the channel ports who are legally required to be placed in the care of the County Council as Looked After Children.
- Address the capital and revenue funding gap for education given Kent's significant demographic challenge, including provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Target resource where it has the greatest impact

- Transform financial management, modelling and forecasting to inform our future budget strategy and medium-term financial plan.
- Develop and implement Outcomes Based Budgeting to inform policy and service decisions.

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- Target our discretionary spend (spending on non-statutory functions) where evidence shows it will have the greatest positive impact.
- Set a clear strategic direction for our trading companies focussed on maximising best value for the council.

Use technology to improve efficiency and reduce cost

- Embrace technology and opportunities to be more efficient in how we provide services, moving towards digital access where this is convenient and appropriate, while maintaining face to face provision where this is needed.
- Provide better digital solutions for Kent residents, improve accessibility and lower our cost to serve.
- Refresh the Technology Strategy to maximise our investment in existing technology and put in place the right capabilities for the future.
- Support staff who can work from home to continue to do so for some of their working time to reduce travel and support staff wellbeing and productivity.
- Rationalise our estate and assets to support new working practices and service delivery arrangements and achieve our target of net-zero emissions from our estate and operations by 2030.



Economic challenge

Why it matters

The economic cost of the COVID-19 crisis is severe and far-reaching. Unemployment has more than doubled in Kent and Medway between March and September this year. Many of the business sectors that Kent's economy relies on have been significantly impacted, including hospitality, construction, and transport. The Kent and Medway economy could potentially see a total output loss of between £5 billion and £7 billion by the end of 2020. Without mitigating action, the economic challenge could create hardship and disadvantage which could take years to reverse. The impact is greatest for those in a weaker position in the labour market and for young people it could permanently damage their career prospects and life chances.

In the face of this challenge, we are working with our partners to deliver the Kent and Medway Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan. This will support businesses, help people access work and skills, attract investment into the county and build confidence. We will do everything we can to support jobs and businesses now, while also taking action to build a greener, fairer and more resilient economy for the future.

COVID-19 has presented a significant opportunity for many businesses and organisations to change their business model and this will likely drive a permanent shift away from requiring staff to commute, with some organisations now actively seeking to move their operations out of London. This reversal of the London pull effect on the home counties presents a significant opportunity for Kent, given our strategic location, transport infrastructure, affordability and opportunities in the creative sector and life sciences which could attract companies and organisations to base their operations in the county.

This would mean that more economic activity would take place locally, with more people spending time and money in their local community rather than in London. If we actively embrace this change it presents an opportunity to create vibrant local towns that are accessible and attractive, become better places to live and work, help businesses to succeed, attract high-quality employment and keep our home-grown talent here.

Kent's population is growing quickly, and it is essential that development is well-planned and well-supported to protect and enhance the unique identity of local areas and quality of life. We need to use our influence to improve the planning system so it better meets the needs of local areas. There are also opportunities to work more closely with our partners to take a strategic approach to planning across the county.

Growth requires investment in infrastructure and there is a gap of around £4 billion for essential infrastructure to support the necessary housing growth in

Kent and Medway to 2031. This is why we are taking an 'infrastructure first' approach, to allow us to secure funding to put necessary infrastructure, like road improvements, more school places and wi-fi, in place before housing is completed. There are also current opportunities to bring forward investment in new infrastructure to stimulate economic growth and instil confidence in key sectors like construction. The COVID-19 crisis has emphasised the need for homes and businesses to have access to high-speed broadband and mobile data and we need to ensure this is available in all parts of the county.

Another key component for a successful economy is a workforce with the right skills. Skills levels in Kent are below the South East and national average and we have skills gaps in key sectors including construction and the creative industry. The current economic crisis brings into sharper focus the need to support young people and all working age adults to develop skills that are relevant to the job opportunities available and that will help them fulfil their potential.

Priority actions to help address the economic challenge

Deliver the Kent and Medway Economic Resilience and Renewal Plan

- Work with our partners to deliver essential support for local businesses, including further funding for Kent and Medway Growth Hub's COVID-19 Helpline for businesses and the Kent and Medway Business Fund, offering loan support for businesses with growth potential.
- Promote Kent's key business sectors and visitor economy and promote confidence among visitors and residents that our county is 'open' within Government guidelines.
- Working with our partners, deliver the Kent and Medway Employment Plan to help the existing workforce develop relevant skills, quickly signpost people who are made redundant to advice and support to find work and encourage growing businesses to employ more local people.
- Represent and lobby for the interests of Kent, including the financial challenges of key sectors (including the voluntary and community sector, cultural sector, logistics and life sciences) and how government policy may impact on this.
- Understand the risk and mitigate the long-term impact of failure of businesses on particular locations, sectors and groups of people, focusing support for people at particular risk, including younger and lower-skilled workers.

Create sustainable local economies

- Seize the opportunities of the reversal of the 'London pull effect' on Kent's economy and encourage and attract more London-based firms to consider relocating to Kent.
- Work with partners to enable the necessary physical, social and cultural infrastructure to make Kent an attractive place to live, work and invest in.
- Work with partners to support and reimagine Kent's high streets and town centres as economic, social and cultural centres.

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- Consider how KCC assets can be used to anchor regeneration and renewal of high streets and town centres.

Champion the rural and green economy

- Promote the low carbon goods and services sector and opportunities for reskilling and job creation in the green economy, including in high opportunity sectors such as solar and hydrogen.
- Explore opportunities to maximise investment in building retrofit programmes, supporting the local retrofit industry.
- Build on the success of Kent's leading centres of research and development in horticulture, plant science and life science which offer potential for high value employment and wider economic growth for the county.
- Develop a Rural Strategy for Kent – a holistic whole-council strategy to support our rural communities and businesses to meet the specific challenges that arise through living and working in rural communities, such as increased costs, social isolation and access to services.

Shape planning reform

- Continue our policy position of 'Infrastructure First' to create balanced housing and employment growth, with high-quality and timely infrastructure as an essential pre-requisite.
- Influence Government's planning reform legislation so that local needs and views are taken into account in planning for new housing development, particularly on funding for the required infrastructure to support sustainable new communities.
- Develop our strategic planning capacity so we can work together with our partners to enable the development of sustainable, connected, safe and healthy communities.
- Progress the Affordable Housing Select Committee action plan including developing a proposal to set up a virtual Housing Growth Unit with partners and exploring ways to release more of our surplus land for building affordable housing.
- Refresh our innovative Growth and Infrastructure Framework to understand the county's infrastructure requirements and the associated funding gap.
- Update our approach and guidance on developer contributions to ensure the right investment in local infrastructure and develop a stronger relationship with both developers and local planning authorities.

Bring forward infrastructure projects to stimulate economic growth

- Progress the Infrastructure Proposition with Government to leverage national investment in the infrastructure, quality housing and economic development the county needs.
- Maximise the benefits of major capital investment projects into Kent, such as a Lower Thames crossing, Ebbsfleet Garden City and the London Resort development.

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- Develop a pipeline of 'shovel-ready' infrastructure projects to act as a catalyst for the construction industry which also deliver a step-change in green infrastructure, helping Kent deliver its zero-carbon ambition.
- Further progress the 'No Use Empty' initiative which provides loans to bring properties that have been empty for a long time back into use as quality housing for sale or rent.
- Accelerate the delivery of the Kent Broadband Programme and continue to work with broadband providers to maximise market-led investment including roll out of 'fibre-to-the-premise' technology.
- Work with mobile network operators to provide enhanced mobile services across Kent.

Empower people with the right skills to compete and succeed

- Work with employers to protect jobs through the upskilling of the workforce and the supply chain, particularly in jobs that require 'Level 3' skills (roughly equivalent to A-Level), which will help people to increase their earning potential.
- Lead the Employment Taskforce which will maximise the local benefit of national employment schemes and ensure the Kent workforce gains from new inward investments and growth in the Kent economy.
- Work with the Employment Taskforce to develop an 'all-age' approach to skills, supporting people to learn and retrain throughout their life so that individuals, businesses and the wider economy are well-equipped to seize economic opportunities.
- Complete the review of Post -16 education and training provision and feed the findings into the work of the Employment Taskforce.
- Intensify efforts to engage employers to offer a range of apprenticeship opportunities, including by continuing to share our Apprenticeship Levy.
- Provide more KCC apprenticeship opportunities in-house and through our trading companies.
- Work with our partners to support young people into work, including maximising benefits from the Government's Kickstart scheme, and developing a network of hubs where young people facing barriers to employment can access work and skills advice.



Demand challenge

Why it matters

Demand for many of KCC's services is rising every year. This is partly caused by changes in the needs of our communities; for example there are more older people who require social care, and more children with special needs and disabilities that we need to support. We anticipate that COVID-19 will have a long-term impact on the demand for KCC services for many years to come. For example, the economic and psychological distress of lockdown on our residents will likely increase demand for our social care and support services. The crisis has also seen many of our providers face rapid acceleration of previously long-term and incremental changes in their market, which challenges their operating model. An example of this is the shift away from residential care to increasing demand for Extra Care housing capacity. This creates new and additional pressure as well as opportunities to redesign and shape services with a range of partners.

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the current patterns of demand we would normally see for some of our key services like children's and adults' social care, and we need to ensure that vulnerable people are receiving the support they need. It is also likely that new demand will emerge as people who would not normally need our support are pushed into crisis. It is important that we have a thorough understanding of the changing needs that lead to demand for our services, taking an intelligent data-led approach. This will allow us to more accurately forecast demand so we are well prepared to respond. The approach will work best if we share intelligence, both across KCC departments and with our partners, and make use of all the information available so we can get a complete picture. We can use digital tools to help us do this, and also make use of digital technology to help meet lower-level needs more efficiently, for example making it easier for people to find advice and complete simple transactions online. For people with complex needs or those that require additional support, we will continue to engage with them face-to-face and provide important human contact.

Children and young people have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and the restrictions it has brought. Many have missed out on education, social and development opportunities, while those moving into adulthood may have experienced disruption to plans for their future. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with additional needs are likely to have missed out the most from schools and services being closed or restricted. Our children's social care teams are seeing an increase in more complex and serious cases. Without additional support, gaps in outcomes and attainment between vulnerable children and their peers will grow, impacting on their life chances. The mental and emotional wellbeing and resilience of children and young people is a growing priority and we will need to ensure that support for this is built into recovery planning for all children and young people and that specialist support is readily available for those that need it.

The crisis has also been challenging for older people and vulnerable adults, and the family and friends that care for them. The adult social care system is already under growing pressure as funding is increasingly stretched to manage greater demand. Now more than ever, we need to make it easier for people to find advice and support including from community organisations that provide informal support and contact, to reduce the need for complex interventions later. We are also working to improve our social care practice and make use of innovations in care so we can support people better. During the COVID-19 crisis we have developed stronger working relationships with providers of adult social care, and we have an opportunity to build on this to develop a stronger market providing good quality care options around the county.

There has been a short-term reduction in demand for transport services as a result of COVID-19, but the long-term growth of the county means that pressure on our transport infrastructure will continue to grow over the coming decades. As well as working with transport providers around their short-term sustainability, we need to work with them to meet the long-term transport needs of a growing county and support our environmental objectives.

While we are meeting current needs, we must also act to safeguard the future by continuing to invest in preventative action and early intervention. Whether this is investing in the quality of our highways to avoid bigger costs later, finding sustainable ways to help families tipping into financial crisis or supporting people to avoid the damaging effects of social isolation and loneliness, we need to know what works most effectively so we can invest in the right actions. We will take an evidence-based approach and focus on the preventative activity that leads to a proven reduction in future needs so that individuals experience better quality of life and demand for our services is reduced.

Priority actions to help address the demand challenge

Develop a stronger evidence-based approach to managing demand

- Strengthen our data-led approach to model and forecast demand, so we have the right evidence to adapt and respond quickly.
- Ensure the views and experiences of residents, staff and providers are part of a holistic evidence base to inform decisions about service redesign and commissioning.
- Understand and manage changes in behaviour, new vulnerabilities and increase in complexity of demand caused by the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on service provision.
- Develop a shared data, analytics and intelligence approach across KCC and with our partners.
- Create digital self-service solutions to manage demand and resolve resident issues quickly and intuitively.

Support children and young people with the highest needs

- Manage overall demand and deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families, support more children to remain with their families where it is safe to do so, and children in care to remain in family based homes, through the Change for Kent Children programme.
- Improve access to emotional and mental health support for children and young people and commission high quality and timely child and adolescent mental health services.
- Work with schools to recover lost learning due to disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis and close attainment gaps between vulnerable children and their peers.
- In partnership with parents and schools, deliver the required improvements to services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as set out in the Written Statement of Action.
- Consider opportunities for providing support and activities for young people online, including youth outreach work.

Support older and vulnerable adults to maintain a good quality of life

- Deliver the Making a Difference Every Day Programme to transform the quality of practice in Adult Social Care to better address the needs of service users, drive innovation and ensure we have meaningful measures of success.
- Explore taking forward a strategic review of in-house adult social care services to determine the most effective ways to provide these services, considering all options available.
- Build on the closer relationship with all care providers developed through the COVID-19 crisis to build resilience and shape a sustainable care market.
- Understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on adult and young carers and refresh the Carers Strategy where appropriate.

Understand and meet long-term demand for transport

- Work with Transport for the South East to understand the changes in demand for transport services and infrastructure as part of the development of a 2050 Transport Strategy for the South East.
- Develop a new Local Transport Plan for Kent to reflect changes to transport policy as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and the climate change emergency, working closely with residents, businesses, local transport providers and local, regional and national partners.
- Consider the appropriate use of active travel schemes (walking and cycling) within the development of the new Local Transport Plan.
- Approve the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 to influence the new South Eastern Rail concession or contract so that it meets Kent's transport and environmental needs.
- Work with bus providers to understand the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis on demand for bus travel and assess the viability of particular bus routes.

Invest in effective prevention

- Take an evidence-based approach to understand the impact of investment in preventative services, to ensure we invest in activity that improves the resilience and wellbeing of residents.
- Continue to deliver our highways asset management approach (roads and public rights of way) to improve quality, reduce costs and maximise capital funding into the county.
- Review and refresh the Social Isolation Select Committee action plan in light of the impact of COVID-19, including considering digital options that work to keep people connected with others.
- Work with partners and Government to develop a sustainable solution for supporting households in financial crisis, food and fuel poverty.
- Work with partners to improve the health and wellbeing of our population, building on new behaviours and understanding developed during COVID-19 of the impact of lifestyle choices on health outcomes. This will recognise the important role that arts, sports and green spaces play in preventative health care.
- Meet our new statutory duties within the Domestic Abuse Bill working with our partners, including planning to ensure accommodation based Domestic Abuse support is available when and where it is needed.



Partnership challenge

Why it matters

One of the great positives of the COVID-19 crisis is that people have come together to support and help each other. This has also been the case for public and community services across Kent. Councils, local NHS services, care providers, schools, voluntary and community groups are coordinating their efforts and breaking down barriers so they can provide the best support for the people that need it. We have an opportunity now to sustain these strengthened relationships to make real and lasting improvements and efficiencies in the services we provide.

Improving our partnership working arrangements will help us manage demand better and make the best use of our resources. It will make it easier for people to find the support they need and for us to help them more efficiently. By working with other organisations that support Kent communities, we can get a better understanding of the causes of demand and how we can best address them. There are opportunities to think differently about how public services in Kent are provided, joining up with some of our closest partners, like Kent's District, Borough and City Councils. We will explore options to share some of our property estates where this could result in savings and provide flexibility for how we work in the future. As we develop and expand our use of digital technology, there are opportunities to align this with our partners to help make it easier for KCC services to work with other public sector organisations.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Kent's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector has been more of a lifeline than ever, helping people and communities stay safe, well and connected. The VCSE plays a vital role in helping individuals and communities support themselves and each other and build a sense of collective identity. The crisis has been extremely challenging for the VCSE and has accelerated the need for us to improve the way we work with and support VCSE organisations. Together with our public sector partners, we want to work with the sector to build its capacity and resilience so it can continue to play a vital role in life in Kent.

The VCSE is also a provider of many services that KCC commissions. Whilst the council and VCSE providers worked extremely well together during the COVID-19 crisis, it also highlighted challenges within our commissioning model. In particular, there is a need to make better and more consistent use of VCSE knowledge and skills in designing solutions and better ways to meet people's needs. This means collaborating earlier on in the commissioning cycle to inform our strategy development. Many of the most challenging issues facing our communities, including mental health problems and homelessness, cannot be tackled in isolation and we need to work with the VCSE and other key partners to find sustainable and effective solutions.

We have a long history of working closely with health partners and aligning health and social care support. KCC is part of new partnership structures for health and social care that aim to take forward improved ways of working together and it is important we get these arrangements right. COVID-19 recovery work has exposed many opportunities to work together to improve services, including to better manage demand for care and residential homes.

As we work through all of the challenges facing us, we are committed to keep talking to Kent's residents, communities and businesses so we understand what is most important for them and what their experiences and views are. We will be honest and open about the choices ahead and report our progress clearly so we can be held accountable. Parish and Town Councils and other local community groups provide invaluable insight into local issues and solutions and we will find better ways to engage with them, including making use of digital technology where this works well.

Priority actions to help address the partnership challenge

Support the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector

- Agree a Civil Society Strategy to support the sector in its wider role in building individual and community resilience and to recognise the importance of social infrastructure.
- Establish a Strategic Partnership Board with the VCSE to create a strategic engagement mechanism between the sector and public sector partners. This will provide a forum to develop our strategy where the VCSE is a key partner and to better understand our collective interaction with the sector.
- Develop a support offer for the VCSE which responds to the challenges identified during COVID-19 recovery to help maintain the local VCSE network whilst supporting it to be sustainable and revitalised within a post-COVID-19 environment.

Better align our service design and commissioning plans with partners

- Work together with the VCSE and other partners to develop a shared strategy around key population-based issues including deprivation, mental health, older people and homelessness.
- Define our Commissioning Strategy to inform the way we work with the VCSE to meet the needs of our communities and to identify potential new partnership models.
- Implement a KCC/NHS programme of partnership work including reviewing partnership arrangements for people with Learning Disabilities and autism, managing care home demand and delivering a plan to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population.
- Play an active role in the Integrated Care System for health and social care across Kent and Medway, and ensure the council has the right level of engagement to successfully support the development of Integrated Care Partnerships in East Kent, West Kent, North Kent and Medway & Swale.

Work with other public sector partners to improve our efficiency

- Explore and continue to promote opportunities with partners to work across the public estate in Kent.
- Explore opportunities to develop multiagency working to tackle some of the most challenging problems facing our communities, including mental health crisis response and tackling serious and organised crime.
- Support and explore opportunities to align our technology and digital aspirations across the public sector to enable more efficient ways of working between public sector agencies.

Better engagement with residents and local communities

- Create a new resident engagement platform so we can prioritise our budget and activities on what is important to Kent's residents.
- Explore joint communication with partners to explain how to access key services.
- Work with Parish and Town Councils to better understand and respond to local issues.
- Use digital opportunities to better engage with Parish and Town Councils and Amenities Societies.



Environmental challenge

Why it matters

Kent's beautiful and iconic natural environment is one of the county's greatest assets. Our growing population and our location as the UK's gateway to Europe creates particular challenges around carbon emissions, air quality and resource consumption. KCC has formally recognised the UK Climate Emergency, which poses a very real threat to quality of life now and for future generations. This is why, whilst tackling the climate emergency, it is also important to ensure our communities are resilient and adapting to climate change. Protecting our natural environment is a priority for many reasons; not only to act against climate change and enhance biodiversity, but also to support our health and wellbeing and grow our economy.

KCC has an important role to lead on how the county addresses environmental challenges and opportunities. We have committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Kent to net-zero by 2050 and to achieve this will require every resident, community and business in the county to take simple steps. These include retrofitting buildings so they are more energy efficient, promoting renewable energy generation and planting more of the right tree species in the right places. As the number of households in the county increases, we need to be sure that we have sufficient water, energy and waste disposal infrastructure and promote careful and sustainable use of these resources.

To deliver on our community leadership role for the environment, we will firstly need to lead by example in our own property estate and operations, delivering our target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030. We will also seek to influence others who provide public services in the county, for example working with transport operators to introduce electric buses and supporting schools to operate in more energy efficient ways. Finally, we will provide advice and expertise so that residents and businesses can take their own actions to reduce emissions. There are unique opportunities now to encourage people to continue changes in behaviours that have emerged during the COVID-19 crisis that have had a positive environmental effect, such as continuing to avoid unnecessary journeys.

With our partners, we want to deliver a 'green recovery' from COVID-19, which means we will consider the environment and rebuild in a way that is sustainable for the future and reduces climate risks. There are significant opportunities to boost our economy and create jobs by attracting investment in activities that will support the environment, such as insulating more homes and developing renewable energy. Kent has a growing low carbon goods and services sector and is home to world-leading research in horticulture and plant science which are important to our economy and must be supported to grow.

The way we live and work is changing, in part accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis which has seen many of us work from home more and travel less. To accommodate these changes we will need sustainable, well-designed homes and communities that support us all to live well. This means homes and communities that 'design in' ways for us to be physically and mentally healthy and resilient, avoid social isolation and build a sense of community identity and belonging. Innovations in technology and design can help ensure that people can safely stay in their own home as they get older with minimal adaptations required. Homes and communities need to be well-connected, both to convenient transport networks and active travel options and through high quality broadband and mobile connection. Access to green spaces, sport, leisure and cultural activities enhances quality of life and should be available in all communities. New homes and buildings must be energy efficient, environmentally sustainable, resilient to climate change and protect biodiversity so we do not create future problems. Residents have told us that they want their local area to feel safe, clean and well-looked after so they can feel proud of where they live.

Priority actions to help address the environmental challenge

Deliver net-zero for Kent by 2050 and promote climate resilience

- Refresh the Kent Environment Strategy to deliver implementation plans and projects which will improve environmental standards, tackle climate change and support growth in the green economy.
- Consider environmental impacts in all our decision making.
- Deliver the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy to contribute to net-zero commitments with our partners and improve air quality.
- Deliver on our commitment to plant a tree for every person in Kent, which totals just over 1.5 million, and enhance other natural assets which increase the storage of carbon, support the recovery of the county's wildlife and benefit residents.
- Deliver the shared priorities in Kent Nature Partnership's Biodiversity Strategy to protect and recover threatened species and enhance wildlife habitats.
- Deliver the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and the Flood Response Plan.
- Manage increasing demand in waste disposal and take action to reduce demand by promoting reuse and recycling.

Deliver net-zero for KCC's estate and operations by 2030 and influence others

- Lead action on our own estate and operations and those of our Trading Companies to reach Net Zero by 2030 through investing in renewable energy generation, shifting to electric vehicles and energy rationalisation across the estate.
- Accelerate delivery of green infrastructure and renewable energy projects including the installation of solar photovoltaic panels on public buildings and retrofitting of public sector estates.

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- Provide advice and guidance for businesses to reduce their carbon emissions including through Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) projects that provide free support to help businesses become more profitable while protecting the environment and encouraging low carbon solutions.
- Reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions by championing adaptations to homes including through the Kent and Medway Warm Homes Programme that helps residents install insulation and reduce bills for energy and water in their homes.
- Incorporate green technology in new school buildings and expand opportunities for schools to invest in energy saving initiatives.

Build sustainable, liveable homes and communities

- Refresh the Kent Design Guide to promote high quality, sustainable development in Kent's communities that meets current and future needs.
- Plan to deliver high quality accommodation solutions for older people and those with support needs and encourage housing design that allows older people to stay safely in their home for as long as possible.
- Actively promote and monitor access to green spaces, sport and healthy activities to improve health and wellbeing.
- Work with local communities to promote access to safe places to walk and cycle as an alternative to travelling by car.
- Champion the need for climate resilience and flooding risk to be considered in planning for new developments.
- Work with District Councils and partner agencies to help keep residents and businesses safe including through our community safety teams and Community Wardens and the work of Trading Standards.
- Build on the coordinated response with partners to issues that damage the public realm, for example KCC's investment and joint working to tackle fly tipping with district and borough councils, Kent Police and other partners.

How we will deliver the Interim Strategic Plan

The Interim Strategic Plan is the corporate business plan for the council for the next 18 months. The priorities within it will be taken forward through either:

- **Strategic Reset Programme:** A number of priorities set out within this plan are within the scope of the council's Strategic Reset Programme (SRP). The SRP is intended to draw together a number of the significant change projects across the council and bring them into a single programme so that overlaps, interdependencies and resources can be better coordinated and managed to ensure successful delivery.
- **Divisional and Service Business Plans:** The development of divisional and service level business plans was paused as a result of the pandemic, with immediate response and recovery plans being used as business plans over the last year. Normal divisional and service level business planning will resume for 2021/22, and where not included within the scope of the SRP, priorities within this plan will be included in the relevant business plan.

Monitoring of this plan will be through the usual governance channels. Cabinet will receive regular updates on performance and Cabinet Committees are able to oversee the delivery of specific priorities within the plan that are within scope of their remit. A close-down report to County Council of this plan as the new 5-Year Plan is approved will also allow Members to scrutinise performance against this plan.

As noted, this interim plan will be replaced by a new 5 Year Plan for the council. The diagram below sets out the timeline for the period of this interim plan and the start of developing the new 5 Year Plan from the latter part of 2021 onwards.

