POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 9th November, 2021

2.00 pm

Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone

Kent County Council
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AGENDA

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 9 November 2021, at 2.00 pm
Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone

Ask for: **Theresa Grayell**
Telephone: **03000 416172**

Membership (16)

Conservative (12):   Mr R J Thomas (Chair), Mr R A Marsh (Vice-Chairman),
Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr T Bond, Mr T Cannon,
Mr N J D Chard, Mr G Cooke, Mr P C Cooper, Mr M Dendor,
Mr R C Love, OBE and Mr J P McInroy

Labour (2):   Mr A Brady and Dr L Sullivan

Liberal Democrat (1):   Mr A J Hook

Green and   Mr P Stepto
Independent (1):

Webcasting Notice
Please note: this meeting may be filmed for the live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site or by any member of the public or press present. The Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is to be filmed by the Council.

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UNRESTRICTED ITEMS
(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

1   Introduction/Webcast announcement

2   Apologies and Substitutes

3   Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

4   Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021 (Pages 1 - 10)

Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 5 - Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

<u>EXEMPT ITEMS</u>
(During these items the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the press and public)

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel
03000 416814

Monday, 1 November 2021

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held online on Wednesday, 22 September 2021

PRESENT: Mr R J Thomas (Chair), Mr R A Marsh (Vice-Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr T Bond, Mr T Cannon, Mr N J D Chard, Mr G Cooke, Mr P C Cooper, Mr M Dendor, Mr A J Hook, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr J P McInroy, Mr P Stepto and Dr L Sullivan

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford and Mr B J Sweetland

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Corporate Director Strategic & Corporate Services), Mrs A Beer (Corporate Director of People and Communications), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mr G Singh (Barrister), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Mr H D'Alton (Investment and Disposal Surveyor), Mr S Dodd (Investment and Development Consultant), Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning Analytics), Mr L Manser (Insurance Manager), Ms C Maynard (Head of Commissioning Portfolio - Outcome 2 and 3), Mr C Wimhurst (Commissioning Standards Manager), Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Miss K Reynolds (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

19. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr A Brady.

There were no substitutes.

20. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda
(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

21. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021
(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 are correctly recorded and a paper copy be signed by the Chairman when this can be done safely. There were no matters arising.

22. Covid-19 Financial Monitoring
(Item 5)

1. Ms Cooke and Mr Shipton introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

   a) the Council had a substantial reduction in the cash situation it would expect to have at this time of year due to a 1% reduction in its tax base. In response to a request for comparative information, Mr Shipton undertook to include in future reports a comparison between the actual figure and the figure the Council would normally expect to have;

   b) due to the number of additional factors facing people who previously qualified for Council Tax Reduction Discount, including recent changes to universal credit, the end of furlough, the end of free school meals in the school holidays and the impact of fuel price rises, it was difficult to predict the scale and pace of the recovery to the usual tax base but the situation was being closely monitored, using monthly data supplied by districts;

   c) asked if there was anything the Council could do to compensate for the end of holiday free school meals, Ms Cooke advised that the Council had looked for ways of doing this but there was unfortunately no option available; and

   d) a view was expressed that it would be helpful for future updates to include a section on the impact of covid-19 upon the Council's capital as well as its revenue budget, and Ms Cooke undertook to do provide this.

2. It was RESOLVED that information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and that future reports include the comparative figures and capital section, as set out above.

23. Strategic and Corporate Services Performance Dashboard
(Item 6)

1. The Chairman referred to the request made at the last meeting for a Member briefing on the dashboard and key performance indicators (KPIs) and advised that this would take place on 29 September 2021.

2. Ms Kennard introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

   a) the time taken to respond to calls to the Contact Point was an ongoing matter of concern but Ms Kennard advised that there had been some improvement in July and August 2021. Mrs Beer advised that this area of performance had been impacted by resignation rates among Agilisys Contact Point staff. Some staff taken on to cover the initial impact of covid-19 were returning to their previous roles as restrictions lifted. For some, needing to work from home for a prolonged period meant they were keen to move back into customer facing roles. Agilisys were recruiting new staff but the time taken to fully train them in all aspects was extensive as the range of issues they had to cover was wide and complex. It was noted that the quality of calls answered remained high;

b) asked for more detail about target FN06, the level of sundry debt to the Council, and if this gave rise to any risk or just a cashflow challenge, Ms Cooke undertook to supply more detail on any specific area;

c) asked about the potential impact on staff of any delay in paying retirement benefits to them (target FN02), Ms Cooke advised that payments to those judged to be most in need were prioritised but that more staff had now been recruited to the Pensions administration team to help support this work;

d) one indicator not currently included in the dashboard was staff turnover and vacancy rates. Mrs Beer advised that turnover was currently reported to the Personnel Committee and that it was an issue for the respective Chairs of the two committees to discuss whether or not it would be useful to report it in addition to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee. A view was expressed that it would be helpful also to report vacancy rates. Mr Watts added that it might be more helpful to include this level of detail in reports to the Personnel Committee and signpost Members to these when they became available for each meeting rather than include this information in the dashboard. He undertook to consider outside the meeting how best to approach this issue; and

e) relating to target GL03, asked if there was any future plan to digitise documents or give more staff access to redacting tools, Mr Watts advised that some testing of redacting software had been undertaken but the cost was prohibitive and staff would need to be confident that any redacting could not be reversed by the recipient of any information. As a result, redacting software had not been generally rolled out. Files which were most often used were digitised but other historic personal case files, which related only to one individual and could be extensive, may only ever be requested by family members and hence would not justify the cost of digitising them. He undertook to consider the issue of the future treatment of archive material and report to a future meeting of the committee.

3.   It was RESOLVED that the performance position for Strategic and Corporate Services and Members' comments, set out above, be noted, with thanks, and the points arising from the Member briefing on 29 September be taken into account in future reporting.

24. Information Governance Update
(Item 7)

1.   Mr Watts introduced the report and presented a series of slides which set out the development of the public right to information since the Freedom Of Information (FOI) Act in 2000 and the Council's rate of compliance with the Act's requirements. Key developments included the increased ease of access to Council information online and the ease and speed of submitting online requests. Factors affecting the Council's ability to respond included the increasing complexity of requests (as many people could now find simpler information by themselves, online), multiple requests and the decreased number of staff available to handle and respond to requests. The process had been reviewed to make it as streamlined as possible and he undertook to report on the data dashboard to a future meeting of the Cabinet Committee.

2.   Mr Watts then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

    a) asked if the Council was able to charge for providing information, as having to pay might improve the quality and clarity of requests submitted, Mr Watts advised that the Council was permitted to charge for requests it considered to be vexatious or unreasonable. The Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement, People and Partnerships, Mr B Sweetland, suggested that requesters could be made aware of the costs to the Council in responding to their request. A view was expressed that some organisations would charge for information which the Council had provided to them at no cost;

    b) interest was expressed in having a comparison of Kent's experience of FOI requests with that of other local authorities to see if the same challenges were shared;

    c) asked how changing the target time for responses would change performance statistics, for example, increasing it from 20 to 25 days to allow for more complex enquiries, Mr Watts advised that the average response time was currently 22 – 23 days. Mr Watts and Mr Sweetland advised that the deadline of 20 days was a statutory requirement and could not be changed by the Council. Late responses would attract fines from the Information Commissioner's Office, with resultant reputational damage. The Council needed to streamline its response process to improve compliance;

    d) a view was expressed that the way in which it responded to FOI requests should be seen as a badge of pride for any democratic body; and

    e) asked if the number and nature of requests could be broken down to show how many of them related to the people of Kent, how many related to issues for which there was a statutory exemption and how many appeals there were, Mr Watts advised that geographical data would be difficult to identify as requesters using email did not have to provide anything more than an email address for the response. Data on the types of requests, however, could be provided in future reports and Mr Watts undertook to do this.

3.   It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and presentation be noted, with thanks, and the additional data requested above be submitted to future meetings.

25.   21/00082 - Insurance Tender - Award of Insurance Programme Contracts
(Item 8)

1.   Ms Cooke and Mr Manser introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

    a) asked how the current excess value quoted in the report had been calculated, Mr Manser advised that this had last been set in 2018 but could

be adjusted in the current process to achieve best value for money. Bidders would be able to offer different levels of excess;

b) asked how confident officers were of achieving the timetable set out in the report, Mr Manser advised that much preparatory work had gone into setting the stages and timetable and that he was confident that both were achievable. Ms Cooke added that the tendering process sought to provide bidders with as much detailed information as possible;

c) asked if the Council was considering reviewing its current choice of broker, for example, to get a better deal with fees, Mr Manser advised that the broker contract was due to be reviewed next year and would allow an opportunity to see how the market had changed and what new options there may be;

d) asked for reassurance that the financial resilience of bidders would be carefully investigated before any contract award was considered, Mr Manser advised that the assessment and cost evaluation process was rigorous and that only bidders receiving the most secure 'A' rating would be considered;

e) Mr Manser advised that it was expected that any insurer offering a policy now would specify some level of exclusion related to covid-19 considerations. The wording of each policy would be examined and assessed on its merits; and

f) asked about the range and type of information the Council needed to have from each bidder to be able to assess their offer, Mr Manser advised that part of the process would be to see what each insurer was willing to cover in their policy and how they proposed to shape it.

2. It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services:

• to confirm the policy position and Kent County Council insurance requirements which make up the Council's Insurance Programme;

• to undertake the necessary procurement, via an insurance broker, of the relevant Insurance Programme contracts;

• to award the contracts to the successful bidders, as identified via the procurement process;

• to delegate authority to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to consider and approve any extensions of the awarded contracts provided for as part of the original contract award and related arrangements; and

• to delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Finance, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to take the necessary actions, including but not limited to,

entering into necessary contracts and other legal agreements, as required to implement this decision,

be endorsed, with one abstention.

26. Decision taken between Cabinet Committee Meetings: 21/00074 - Interim infrastructure support to the Voluntary Sector
(Item 9)

1. Mr Whittle introduced the report and advised that a report on the next stage of the project, the draft strategy, would be submitted to the committee's November meeting. In response to a question, he and Mr Watts clarified that this stage would need a separate key decision.

2. The committee NOTED the taking of key decision 21/00074, to fund a pilot for Volunteering Infrastructure across the county and a Strategic Recovery Fund to support the Voluntary Sector in Kent, between meetings of the Cabinet Committee, in accordance with the process set out in the Council's constitution.

27. Work Programme 2021/22
(Item 10)

It was RESOLVED that the committee's planned work programme for 2021/22 be agreed.

28. Update from the Contract Management Review Group (CMRG)
(Item 11)

It was noted that this item had been listed in error under the restricted section of the agenda. Discussion of the item therefore took place entirely in open session. The report was later re-published with its correct status as a supplement to the agenda pack for the meeting.

1. Ms Maynard and Mr Wimhurst introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

2. Asked for a list of all working groups covering various areas of the Council's work, and if the number of different groups and their way of working and reporting were as efficient as they could be, Mr Wimhurst, Mr Watts and Ms Maynard advised that:

   a) the CMRG had a new Chairman and was reviewing its way of working and reporting structure;

   b) the group had been established as an executive mechanism to test assurance and report back to Members. Its Chair and Vice-Chair were elected Members and its membership included officers from commissioning, procurement and finance, with guest speakers attending to present information on specific contracts;

c) the group used standards established by the National Audit Office and it and other such groups offered an opportunity for the Council to check its performance and raise its game; and

d) Mr Watts undertook to supply Members with a list of all groups currently working.

3.   Mr Oakford commented as Chair of the CMRG and said that its work had been useful in identifying contracting arrangements which could be improved.

4.   It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to questions be noted, with thanks.

29.   Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

The committee RESOLVED that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEMS
(Open access to Minutes)

30.   Disposal of land at Bensted House, Kiln Court, Osbourne Court and Former SEC, Faversham, ME13 7NY
(Item 12)

1.   Mr Oakford advised the committee that the proposed disposal was part of the regular asset disposal programme but was being reported to the committee for comment due to its large financial value. It gave the Council an opportunity both to gain income from the sale and put an end to the ongoing costs of maintaining the premises.

2.   Mr D'Alton introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

a) officers were challenged by the local Member whose electoral division included the site about the lack of engagement with him. He asked that officers meet him to appraise him of the details of the proposal and the bids received;

b) concern was expressed about the choice of preferred bidder named in the report, and discussion followed about the bids received from it and other companies, comparing the level of Section 106 funding each had offered, the number of residential units they each proposed and the percentage of these which would be affordable;

c) concern was expressed that the recommendation on which the committee was being asked to comment did not name the preferred bidder. Mr D'Alton and Mr Oakford advised that the committee was being asked to endorse or comment on the overarching proposal and delegate to the Director of Infrastructure the selection of the best bid and to finalise the contractual

terms of the disposal to secure the best value for money, as was always the aim with any property disposal;

d) asked if, with the aim of securing best value for money, the Council was able to specify that bidders must include Section 106 funding as part of their bids, Mr D'Alton advised that bidders were expected to include Section 106 funding and not to do so would make their bid less attractive; and

e) the committee was advised that the County Council was not able to specify the nature of the affordable housing to be included, for example, to be for sale or rental, but that this would fall to the local planning authority to direct when considering a planning application for the site.

3.   A motion by Mr G Cooke to amend the wording of the recommendation to include the name of the preferred bidder was not seconded. Mr Watts suggested that Mr Cooke seek to specify instead what he wanted to see covered rather than specify the name of a bidder.

4.   Mr G Cooke then proposed and the Chair, Mr R Thomas, seconded that recommendation 1 in the report be amended to add the words *'....on the most advantageous terms for the County Council that it is able to secure'.* This was agreed with two abstentions.

5.   It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree to the disposal of the sites and delegate authority to:

1. the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal, on the most advantageous terms for the County Council that it is able to secure; and

2. the Director of Infrastructure to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above,

be endorsed.

31.   Disposal of KCC's interest in the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office, 98 Sandling Road and Cantium House, 99-102 Sandling Road, Maidstone, Kent to Maidstone Borough Council.
(Item 13)

1.   Mr Oakford advised the committee that the proposed disposal was part of the regular asset disposal programme but was being reported to the committee for comment due to its large financial value. The report set out the history of the Council's interest in the site and the more recent reduction in the need for office space arising from the covid-19 pandemic and changing work practices.

2.   Mr Dodd introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

a) asked which was the preferred option, as the recommendation in the report did not specify, Mr Dodd advised that it was option 1 – the County Council to sell its 50% stake of the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office plus its freehold interest in Cantium House to Maidstone Borough Council;

b) asked about the comparative overage for the two sites – the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office and Cantium House – and if the same condition could be applied to both, Mr Dodd advised against seeking to make this too complicated or restrictive for the future; and

c) concern was expressed about future development or use of the sites and the potential for unattractive development which may be out of place in the area, and the Council's ability to influence this, once it no longer owned the site, Mr Dodd advised that this issue could be mitigated by a new Collaboration Agreement between the County Council and the Borough Council to protect the Councils' respective interests, including references to The Borough Council's emerging Draft Local Plan policy for the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office and Cantium House for a high quality, residential-led mixed use scheme with emphasis on the importance of the setting around County Hall.

3. It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree to complete the freehold disposal of the County Council's interest in the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office and Cantium House and delegate authority to:

    1. the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal; and

    2. the Director of Infrastructure to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreement required to implement the above,

    be endorsed.

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From: **Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

                    Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee - 9th November 2021**

Decision No: **N/A**

Subject: **Facilities Management Procurement Update**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 20th March 2020
Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 29th July 2020
Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 14th January 2021

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This paper seeks to update the **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** on progress regarding the Facilities Management re-procurement.

Recommendations: The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked **to note** progress.

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1. Background

1.1. The Council currently commissions Total Facilities Management (TFM) services with two providers, Amey and Skanska, for the KCC corporate landlord estate, and some statutory compliance for schools, which are the responsibility of Kent County Council (KCC). The Council also makes available waste services, cleaning, and catering services to schools through separate contracts, which are not part of the TFM service.

1.2. The current TFM contracts have been extended to 31st October 2022, with the option to break from May 2022. The extension was agreed to support service continuity and to allow the market to re–establish itself following the COVID-19 pandemic and allow time for the re-procurement of the Facilities Management (FM) contract to progress.

1.3. As set out in the report, presented to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 29th July 2020, the delivery model chosen was to procure one countywide hard FM contract (including statutory compliance, planned preventative maintenance, project services, helpdesk, handypersons, landscaping, and ground maintenance services) and multiple countywide soft FM contracts (including cleaning, catering, waste, feminine hygiene, pest control, reception, and Security services).

1.4. A progress update on the hard services procurement was provided to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on Thursday 14th January 2021. This confirmed market engagement, continued development of the tender documentation and preparation of the supplier qualification documents, for shortlisting suppliers for the tender stage.

1.5. The current Total Facilities Management (TFM) contracts with Skanska (West and East Kent) and Amey (Mid Kent) expire in October 2022. The contracts have been in place since October 2014 and have been extended by an additional one year from the initial term of seven years (five years with a two-year extension) to give a total term of eight years.

1.6. KCC needs to procure these services to ensure that the Council can continue to safely occupy its buildings post October 2022. Other delivery options have been considered which include:

> 1.6.1 Continuing with a TFM model split by geographic area.
> 1.6.2 Different combinations of disaggregated contracts.
> 1.6.3 In-sourcing the provision.

1.7. These options have been explored and discussed in detail at the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee who endorsed the procurement of the proposed option to appoint a Hard Facilities Services Provider and a series of Soft Services Facilities Management providers.

1.8. The new facilities management model will include the following contracts:

> 1.8.1 Hard Services - one countywide provider for maintenance and helpdesk services for schools and corporate estate (all property across the Council is held as part of the Corporate Landlord).
> 1.8.2 Catering - one countywide provider for catering, hospitality, water coolers and vending for corporate estate and two countywide providers for catering for schools.
> 1.8.3 Security - one or more countywide provider(s) for manned guarding, key holdings, patrols and vacant sites.
> 1.8.4 Cleaning and Feminine Hygiene - one countywide provider for schools and corporate estate.
> 1.8.5 Waste - one countywide provider for corporate estate and schools.
> 1.8.6 Pest Control - one countywide provider for corporate landlord.
> 1.8.7 Soft Landscaping - one countywide provider for Corporate Landlord.

1.9. The new contracts will start in November 2022, to align with the commencement of the Hard FM Services Contract. The mobilisation periods are dependent on the complexity of the service but will generally start between May and August 2022. The procurement programmes will vary dependent upon the procurement route. The first and longest procurement relates to the Hard FM contract followed by the Soft Services.

2. **Update on hard services progress and activity**

   2.1. **Selection Questionnaire**

   2.1.1. The value of the hard service contract procurement is above the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) threshold and therefore needs to be procured and advertised in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations (PCR) 2015. Following a period of supplier engagement and soft market testing a supplier selection questionnaire (SQ), along with draft tender and contract documentation was published on 29th March 2021. The questionnaire included mandatory and project specific questions. The questions were split into mandatory (pass/fail) and project specific which included:

   - Technical & Professional Ability

     o Maintenance Services (three case studies)
     o Supply Chain Sub-contracting
     o Environmental Services
     o Health and Safety
     o Minor works projects

   - Professional Capacity

     o Technology and Innovation
     o Partnering and Collaboration
     o Social Value

   2.1.2. There was a strong market response to the procurement with twelve bidders submitting a formal return. This questionnaire was scored in accordance with the evaluation criteria and suppliers were ranked highest to lowest, with the top three suppliers taken through to tender stage. Suppliers were advised of their success or otherwise and given feedback on their submissions. The three successful suppliers all confirmed their continued interest in this tender opportunity.

   2.2. **The Tender Process**

   2.2.1. The tender documentation was issued to the three bidders in accordance with the programme, on 9th July 2021. There were a number of bidder clarification meetings and questions which were responded to. Tenders were returned on 24th September 2021, for evaluation of both quality and price. The quality questions required suppliers to demonstrate how they will deliver against the requirements set out in the specification and contract. The quality questions have been weighted and once scored, the price is divided by the suppliers overall quality score, providing a "price per quality point" (PPQP), which ensures that quality is a strong contribution to the evaluation model, the lower the PPQP the better value for money.

   2.2.2. The Suppliers will be ranked in order of PPQP and the supplier with lowest PPQP will be recommended to be awarded the contract.

2.3. **Next stages**

2.3.1. Once the tender documentation has been evaluated and the price analysed, it is likely that there will be a second tender stage which may reduce the number of bidders to two. During this stage there will be a period of negotiation/clarification, to ensure that the delivery plans, price, and risk profile meet KCC's requirements.

2.3.2. The below table sets out a high-level indicative timeline, with key dates, decision and update points for the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, as part of the proposed contract award.

Timeline	
Activity	Date
Tender Evaluation, recommendation and down selection/ shortlisting if appropriate.	27th September 2021 - 3rd December 2021
Authority to determine whether to make an award or move to negotiations. If the latter occurs, the following indicative timetable will apply.	
Final tender period.	6th December 2021 - 4th February 2022
Decision for hard and soft contracts and delegation of authority for entering Contracts.	January 2022
Final tender evaluation, recommendation, approvals, contract award and standstill period.	7th February 2022 - 31st March 2022
Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee update on award.	March 2022
Mobilisation Period (7 months)	1st April - 31st October 2022
Contract commencement	1st November 2022

Please note this programme assumes no new delays as a result of further COVID-19 issues.

3. **Update on soft services progress and activity**

3.1. **Progress**

3.1.1. There are a number of different soft service procurement workstreams, the main ones being:

- Cleaning
- Security
- Waste
- Soft Landscaping
- Catering

3.1.2. Other services such as mail, porterage and pest control will be delivered by the KCC team or in a different way, such as using technology solutions.

3.1.3. The development of the specifications and tender is underway, which will align to the hard services documentation and include an interface agreement to promote collaboration between suppliers of different services. The Hard

Services Contract includes a helpdesk, which will be used for reporting soft service calls, to enable stakeholders to have one point of contact for FM issues.

3.2. Programme

3.2.1 The soft services procurements all have their own programmes, which align with the expiry of the existing TFM contract on 31st October 2022. Development of the soft services commercial cases and specifications has commenced, and procurement routes are being finalised.

3.3. The Tender Process

3.3.1 The contracts will be different for each service-line but will be aligned to the Hard Services Contract and include an Interface Agreement to ensure that the services are coordinated, and suppliers collaborate.

4. Contract Management

4.1. In parallel with the procurement workstream a review of the structure of the Facilities Management Team continues, with a view to aligning the Management Team with the new contract structure and to ensure skills within the services meet the needs of the contracts in place. This structure will need to be within the available budgets, although there may be a requirement to move costs from the TFM Contract to the KCC staffing budget, to keep the expenditure in-line with available funding.

4.2. Robust contract management will be required to hold providers to account in conjunction with clear performance indicators. The performance indicator model for hard services has been developed alongside a reduction in the number of performance indicators, to focus on key areas. This includes a ratchet and earn back ability which is a system that allows for continued poor performance to be penalised to further incentivise the contractor.

5. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked **to note** progress.

6. Background Documents

None.

7. Contact details

Report Author: Karen Ripley	Relevant Director: Rebecca Spore
Special Projects Manager	Director of Infrastructure
Telephone number 03000 416	Telephone number 03000416716
E-mail: karen.ripley@kent.gov.uk	E-mail: Rebecca.spore@kent.gov.uk

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From: Mike Hill- Cabinet Member for Community Services

                   David Cockburn – Head of Paid Service, Corporate Director of
                   Strategic & Corporate Services

To: **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee – 9 November 2021**

Decision No: **21/00055**

Subject: **Final draft of the Civil Society Strategy and consultation
                   feedback**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Members and Corporate Management Team

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet

Electoral Division: Countywide- all divisions affected

Summary:

KCC's draft Civil Society Strategy (CSS), is a key strategy for the County Council and a commitment under the Interim Strategic Plan. The CSS has undergone a 4-week consultation period, prior to this we undertook a 9-week consultation on the previous draft, which was written pre-Covid. The decision was taken to pause the development of the strategy, revise, and re-consult to reflect the impact of the pandemic.

The draft strategy has now been updated to reflect the insights gathered and this report provides an overview of the consultation, the feedback, and the subsequent changes to the final draft of the strategy. Following P&R Cabinet Committee and any subsequent changes to the strategy, Cabinet will take the decision to adopt the CSS.

Recommendation(s):

For Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee to:

1) Comment on the revised strategy and consultation

2) Agree the adoption of the Civil Society Strategy

3) Agree that the infrastructure budget will be allocated in accordance with the strategy framework and any decisions on expenditure will be made by the relevant Cabinet Members.

4) Note the proposal to take forward the actions from the Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation.

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1.   **Background**

1.1   Kent County Council made a commitment to adopt a new Civil Society Strategy[1]
      (CSS) in 2019, the proposal for this came to Policy and Resources Cabinet

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[1] *By Civil society we mean all those individual, informal, and formal groups and organisations that operate outside of state control and for the primary purpose of social good.*

Committee in November 2019 and formal consultation on the draft strategy began in February 2020, running until April. However, the events of the pandemic overtook, and it was agreed to pause the final development of the strategy and concentrate on Covid response and recovery and to give time to reflect on the impact of the pandemic. Since this time, a great deal of work has taken place with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to improve partnership working and engagement and this development of this final strategy has been informed by that.

1.2 The decision to move to a Civil Society Strategy was informed partly by the publication of the first Government Civil Society, however, 'Civil Society' also allowed us to recognise the contribution of both the registered charities and voluntary organisations but also the many informal groups and individual volunteers who play an important role in our communities. This also reflected the conversations we had with the sector since the publication of the VCS policy. We therefore took the decision in 2019 to broaden out the VCS policy into a new Civil Society Strategy, with the social sector at the core.

Links to KCC's Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation

1.3 In 2019 KCC's Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation made several recommendations including the development of a KCC corporate strategy aimed at tacking loneliness and social isolation in Kent. Scrutiny Committee (26th July 2019) agreed that relevant elements of this recommendation would be discharged through the development of a Civil Society Strategy (CSS). The CSS was however never intended to be a 'loneliness' strategy; the primary objective of the CSS was to set out the important role that civil society plays in supporting people and communities, the economic contribution of the social sector, underpin KCC's strategic relationship with the social sector and KCC's commitment to supporting both civil society and the social sector to flourish and be sustainable. As the National Loneliness Strategy established, civil society and the social sector are only one pillar to tackling this agenda it is not the sole solution and many aspects of that agenda sit outside of a strategy focused on civil society. However, the CSS does set out the important role of resilient and connected communities in tackling social isolation and the need to support the social infrastructure that underpins this- set out in Chapter 2.

1.4 Scrutiny Committee met on 13th October to consider progress against the Select Committee action plan and observed that whilst the pandemic had an undeniable impact on the authority's ability to respond to the action plan it remained an important agenda and indeed had been heightened by the pandemic. The committee recommended a reset on the recommendations, referred the matter back to the Executive to review and to report back to the scrutiny committee in 6 months' time.

1.5 The Interim Strategic Plan, agreed by County Council in December 2020, committed to reviewing and refreshing *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*. Indicative discussions with Cabinet Members following scrutiny committee propose that the recommendations will be reviewed, and a revised action plan should be developed. This will allow us to reflect the events of the last 18 months, the work that has been undertaken as a result and set out a framework for responding to this important agenda in the context of Covid. It was also recognised that much of the work to tackle social isolation sits outside of KCC and any actions must reflect the need for partnership working.

1.6 Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance alongside Adult Social Care will lead on the review of the action plan and will take this back through scrutiny committee in due course.

2. Context:

2.1 The Civil Society Strategy discharges the commitment made in the Interim Strategic Plan agreed by County Council on 10 December to support a strong Civil Society and the Voluntary sector as a core part of that. As detailed in the strategy we have put in place interim plans to support the social sector for this financial year (2021-22), but the strategy will provide the framework for our long-term infrastructure support.

2.2 The budget allocation for support is £700Kp.a. or £2.1m over the life of the strategy. The budget for the support is held by Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance (SPRCA) as the strategy owners and is allocated from base budget and the Public Health budget, with a 50% split. Whilst both a Civil Society Strategy and infrastructure support offer to the VCS is not a statutory responsibility it remains a significant political priority that has only strengthened in the last year. Many Councils do continue to fund support to the sector; however, KCC's support offer is unique in its scale. The intention of our infrastructure support budget is to help to build a sustainable and resilient voluntary sector and to support civil society it is not to create dependency or dictate the direction of activity.

2.3 As set out in the strategy, we believe that the importance of this strategy has only grown in the last year. Not only because of the incredible response we have seen from our communities, voluntary organisations, and local people but because of the undeniable impact the pandemic has and will continue to have on us as individuals, communities and as organisations and the need to recognise and respond to that. We have reflected on the events of the last year and updated the strategy to respond to the challenges we have faced and will continue to face as we recover. The final strategy is provided in Annex 1 and an Executive Summary has been produced in Annex 2; we hope this will provide a useful reference document for the sector.

3 Consultation process

3.1 The consultation on the final strategy began on the 6th September and ran until the 3rd October and was undertaken as an online survey. Prior to this consultation we carried out a 9-week consultation on the original draft strategy back in February 2020 and we have taken the findings from both consultations to inform this final draft.

3.2 A VCS Recovery Cell was established during the pandemic as part of the Kent Resilience Forum architecture and the impact assessment and action plan developed by that group of VCS representatives (facilitated by KCC and Medway officers) was used to revise the strategy.

As set out in the strategy itself, since then we have established a VCSE Steering Group, which is made up of VCS representatives and is independent to KCC. We have worked collaboratively with this group prior to the formal consultation to revise the strategy, sharing early drafts for comment and these discussions were reflected in the draft which we have consulted on. The feedback set out in this report therefore reflects a combination of all the consultation and engagement undertaken

3.3 It is worth reflecting on the considerable pressure organisations have faced over the last 18 months and to thank all those that have taken the time to respond to the most recent consultation. Whilst the number of responses to the second consultation were lower than we had hoped – 9 submissions, we widely circulated the strategy through the VCSE Steering Group (asking them to cascade), colleagues in KCC, District Councils and through social media. We believe this response reflects not only the demands on organisations at this time and their ability to partake but also that we had already consulted on the original draft when responses were much higher. Given we have worked alongside the sector to develop the strategy over the last year through our engagement channels and the responses to the consultation, we are

confident that it has been well socialised and reflects both the needs of the sector and the relationship, which KCC is wanting to establish.

4. Main consultation findings

4.1 The findings from the consultation are summarised under each of the following headings and any subsequent changes to the strategy are provided. In addition, the consultation report, You said, we did' provided in Annex 3, sets out in more detail the responses and how these were used.

4.2 Demographics of respondents:

Caveat: The consultation was open to any organisation to respond and therefore not intended to be a representative survey of the sector. It was specifically targeted at VCSE organisations as opposed to the wider public.

Over the course of the two formal consultations a total of 78 individual responses were received. This does not include the engagement undertaken with the VCSE Steering Group. Most responses (69%) were either from individuals responding on behalf of a registered charity, community group, social enterprise, or a trustee/volunteer.

4.3 Terminology

The shift to a Civil Society Strategy, was intended to acknowledge the diversity in the social sector and that many organisations operating in our communities are not funded by KCC, may be very informal or comprise of just one or two individuals volunteering in their local area to do social good. The intention of this strategy was to move past a transactional relationship of the past, where primarily our strategic engagement was with those, we have some funding arrangement with, to a wider relationship. This strategy acknowledges that most activities, which promote social good are not funded by KCC and yet play an important part in our communities but also that it is entirely appropriate that this activity, whilst important to the County Council is independent.

We also took the decision, through engagement with the sector, to use the term 'social sector' rather than 'voluntary sector'. The sector had challenged, in particular the VCSE Steering group, the use of the term 'voluntary' and felt it sometimes undervalued the economic contribution the sector makes to the local economy and can give the impression the sector can exist on little or minimal funding.

4.3.1 Feedback and proposed changes

This use of terminology and the rationale was supported by the consultation responses, with most respondents across both consultations supporting the move to a 'civil society' strategy and with the use of the phrase 'social sector'. A small minority felt that it was difficult to know exactly what we meant by these terms and so we have added a more detailed section on terminology to be clear. We also acknowledge that there will always be a range of terms used to describe the 'sector' and not all will agree with this use of language but for this strategy and the relationship it sets out, 'social sector' is the right term.

4.4 Challenges and opportunities facing the sector post Covid.

The strategy sets out the diverse ways the sector supports our communities, through both the People and Place chapters.

The strategy highlights the role of civil society in supporting people through both formal services, funded by KCC but also through the wider safety net it provides. It also recognises that the impact of Covid will see an increase in demand for this support and the challenges this may bring. It highlights the role of volunteers within our communities and the increasing role this informal infrastructure has played over the past 18 months, and the opportunities this could bring if we support or facilitate this 'social action' in our communities outside of a pandemic.

The Place section of the strategy highlights the role of the sector in building resilient communities and the range of ways that civil society supports our community assets, positive activities for young people and importantly the contribution it makes to our local economy.

The opportunities to work collaboratively in partnership with civil society to deliver services, develop innovative solutions to the challenges we collectively face and the need for this to be a key part of the place-based approach are set out. Whilst it is acknowledged that our infrastructure support, set out in Chapter 3 must help to enable this.

4.4.1 **Feedback and proposed changes**

The VCSE Steering group provided insights into the challenges facing the sector, whilst the action plan developed by the VCS Recovery Cell was also used to shape the revised strategy and direction of these sections. Therefore, the draft was informed by first-hand experience of the sector, and we are pleased that the consultation responses supported the direction set out and found that it accurately reflected the challenges facing the sector post Covid. However, some respondents felt that the opportunities to work more collaboratively could be further emphasised and we have now set out in the strategy our commitment to working more collaboratively with the sector through our engagement and in our commissioning approach. We have also recognised in the strategy the need to work with partners as we look to take forward this work and how we can facilitate engagement and collaboration at the local level. Some respondents felt that our aspiration to value the sector as an equal partner could be strengthened and we have now reflected this in our aims and objectives and in our approach to engagement.

4.5 **Support to the Sector**

Alongside this strategy is a budget commitment over the 3 years, which will be used to deliver infrastructure support to the sector through the strategy framework. A summary of how this support will be provided and what it will focus on is provided in the Executive summary but is set out in more detail in Chapter 3 of the Strategy.

Objectives of KCC support for the social sector:

- *Establishing a strategic relationship with the social sector- so that it can effectively engage and influence.*
- *Enabling a sustainable, diverse, and independent social sector in Kent, which can grow and develop.*
- *Enabling a coordinated, properly resourced, and sustainable volunteering system across the county.*
- *Creating the right conditions for small community organisations to respond to communities' needs and for communities to be empowered.*

4.5.1 **Engagement**

A strategic relationship through more open and honest dialogue is a key part of our support offer. As set out in the strategy we have established a VCS Strategic

Partnership Board (KCC, district, NHS and VCSE representation) and an independent VCSE Steering Group. As part of our infrastructure offer, we propose to evolve the VCSE Steering Group into a more formal representative body with rotational membership alongside the current Chair of the group and to look at other ways to improve collaboration and engagement with the sector. This includes working with partners such as NHS to create more meaningful engagement channels and considering how this links up with forums at the local level for example, through district councils.

4.5.2 Feedback and proposed changes

In the first consultation the majority of respondents agreed that more open dialogue was needed, which did not purely focus on commissioning and funding. Since then, we have as stated improved our engagement through the now established VCSE Steering Group and Partnership Board, which is allowing a flow of information, collaboration and partnership working.

Responses from the second consultation and discussions with the Steering Group, showed the introduction of these engagement channels as a positive step, however not all were aware of the Steering Group and therefore more work is required to ensure that this forum is accessible and established as a trusted route for sector engagement. This is recognised in the strategy.

The majority agreed with an independent Steering Group, nominated, or elected by the sector with a rotational membership but stated that how this works in practice; is truly independent with the right expertise is a challenge. These challenges are recognised in the strategy and will be taken forward as we work to evolve and improve the model alongside the sector.

Respondents also felt that more engagement mechanisms to support collaboration were most likely needed. We have updated the strategy to ensure it seeks to address this and as part of our support offer, we will evolve our engagement alongside our partners such as the NHS and district councils to ensure that we are working with other engagement channels and not duplicating.

4.6 Business Support

Access to appropriate business support such as developing funding strategies organisational plans, a digital approach and governance advice will be a key plank of our support offer. For 21/22 this will be delivered through the Strategic Recovery Fund as set out and the impact monitoring from this fund will help to inform how we take this forward and the funding mechanism that will be used.

4.6.1 Feedback and proposed changes

In both consultations access to financial advice and support was considered most important. There were mixed responses regarding access to business support, where some felt able to access the right support whilst others had not been able to. The main barrier to accessing support across both consultations was the ability to fund it alongside time constraints.

KCC's commitment in the strategy to contribute to business support, initially through the Strategic Recovery Fund, is intended to tackle the challenges organisations face in availability of funds to buy in expertise but also free up time of those running the charity by using outside support and expertise.

We also received feedback that access to good advice for new organisations to start up and develop was important, especially as we have seen new organisations emerge during the pandemic, which will look to continue. This type of governance advice and organisational support will be a feature of our 'business support' offer and is included in our Strategic Recovery Fund.

4.7 Volunteering

Volunteers, or 'social action' are an intrinsic part of the strategy and mentioned throughout in the many roles they play in our communities, often underpinning the many groups and organisations that make up civil society.

The need for a well-resourced and co-ordinated volunteering network across the County was highlighted in the VCS Recovery Cell action plan. The Volunteer Centres provided advice and support to hubs supporting those that were shielding, whilst continuing to co-ordinate those that volunteered within their local communities throughout the pandemic. They also supported volunteers who were not able to volunteer for health reasons; ensuring they remained connected and engaged.

The strategy therefore sets out a specific commitment to supporting volunteer infrastructure as part of our support offer. We have committed in the strategy and already funded a volunteering infrastructure pilot for this financial year, which will be evaluated to inform our future support for volunteering.

4.7.1 Feedback and proposed changes

This area of support has been developed as a direct result of the pandemic and from priorities set out in the VCS Recovery Cell action plan and informed by engagement with the VCSE Steering Group.

Responses to the consultation welcomed this addition to the strategy and most respondents reported they had accessed support to recruit volunteers, had concerns about recruiting and retaining volunteers in the future and identified a need for advice and support to assist them in doing so. As a result, no further changes were made to this section of the strategy.

4.8 Creating the right conditions for small organisations to respond to communities needs

The strategy recognises the important role of grassroots organisations in supporting our local communities, providing activities for young people and in running many community assets. It is this social infrastructure, which has provided resilience over the last 18 months and will continue to do so. The support offer therefore, includes funding to support this infrastructure in a way that is sustainable and does not seek to formalise or control local projects. We have funded a 2-year pilot of Crowdfunding – CrowdFund Kent to support locally led and locally supported projects and community groups. This will be evaluated to inform our future support to meet his objective.

4.8.1 Feedback and proposed changes

During the first consultation organisations reported the need for access to grants for small organisations as the most important priority for infrastructure support. At the time we were exploring options such as Crowdfunding to enable this and felt it was important that the mechanism did not create formal arrangements with the Council and was sustainable, drawing in funding from various sources not just KCC. Since then, we have established CrowdFund Kent to support local organisations and community projects and the strategy has been updated to reflect this.

4.9 Fair Funding

We know that our funding practices can destabilise or support the social sector; our approach to commissioning and funding helps to set a tone for our relationship and partnership working with the sector. Therefore, the strategy considers a 'fair funding' approach as a key part of our support offer.

The strategy recognises that there has been differing practice in the past with our grant funding, which we have addressed through the grant framework from 2015 and which has been slightly revised but reinforced in this strategy.

However, there remains some criticism from the sector in relation to elements of our commissioning and the challenges faced by the sector when either bidding for KCC services or when in receipt of funding under contract.

Through engagement with the VCSE Steering Group we have strengthened references to some of the challenges faced by the sector when delivering services under contract and the need to address these. These are well debated issues around sustainability and costs, which are not unique to Kent, however the strategy commits to undertaking work to look at these issues in more detail alongside the sector, which will discharge the action from the VCS Recovery Cell. This will be part of the work we undertake to evolve our commissioning model to ensure it has a greater emphasis on locality and to look at how our commissioning can work with communities to build resilience and improve the focus on place.

> *VCS Recovery Cell Action Plan, action 20*: *Commissioning: review and reflect on service delivery models and the culture of commissioning - lessons learnt from COVID-19 to inform future strategy. Particularly consider the impact of a reduction in voluntary income during COVID-19 and the fragilities that has exposed e.g., issues around full cost recovery. Look at opportunities for more innovative, sustainable and flexible commissioning and service delivery. Treating the VCSE as an equal partner and involving the sector in discussions to improve and reform service delivery.*

5. Next steps

5.1 The strategy will be agreed by the Cabinet on the 9th December. Once this decision is taken a communication exercise will be undertaken to ensure that all KCC staff, are aware of the strategy and its implications for our relationship with and support for the social sector and civil society.

5.2 We will continue to review the support we have put in place such as the Crowdfunding pilot, Volunteering pilot and the Strategic Recovery Fund. The evaluation of each of these will be used to define the long-term arrangements for support underpinned by the strategy framework. The budget committed against this strategy to provide infrastructure support will be allocated accordingly in line with the evaluation findings. We will also be reviewing our engagement mechanisms namely the VCS Steering Group alongside the Chair and the group members over the next 6 months and will look to have refined these arrangements as a result by the start of the new financial year.

5.3 A report outlining our progress against the Measures of Success defined in the strategy will be brought to Cabinet and P&R Cabinet Committee by the end of 2022 as set out in the strategy. The information used to monitor progress will as set out in the model, be collated through partnership working; using a range of sources and the intelligence and insights of partners, the VCS Strategic Partnership Board will provide the mechanism for this.

5.4 The consultation report in Annex 3 'You said, we did' will be provided to all who registered to take part in the online consultation and to the VCSE Steering Group. and will be accompanied by the final strategy document when published on our website.

6. Recommendations:

For Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee to:

1) Comment on the revised strategy and consultation process and findings

2) Agree the adoption of the Civil Society Strategy

3) Agree that the infrastructure budget will be allocated in accordance with the strategy framework and any decisions on expenditure will be made by the relevant Cabinet Members.

4) Note the proposal to take forward the actions from the Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation.

7. Background Documents

Annex 1- Final draft Civil Society Strategy

Annex 2- Executive Summary

Annex 3 -Consultation report 'You said, we did'.

Annex 4 – Proposed Record of Decision

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Kent County Council

Civil Society

Strategy for Kent 2021-2024

Supporting connected communities
and a sustainable social sector in Kent

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce Kent County Council's (KCC) draft Civil Society Strategy. This replaces our Voluntary, Community Sector (VCS) policy adopted in 2015 and is a key strategic document for the County Council.

We first drafted this strategy in 2019 to recognise the role of civil society in Kent in supporting connected communities and the importance of the informal and formal groups that provide opportunities for people to come together. Since then, we have experienced challenges we would not have foreseen and whilst this strategy has been revised amongst many uncertainties, what we have most certainly seen over the last 18 months is the important role civil society plays in our communities. I am convinced more than ever of the importance of this strategy and the commitments it sets out for the County Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the work of the Voluntary Sector Recovery Cell, established at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 as part of the Kent Resilience Forum architecture. This cell, made up of several VCSE representatives, developed an impact assessment and subsequent action plan, which mapped out the steps to recovery and which we have used to revise this strategy post Covid. The establishment of the cell has led to much improved partnership working, which we believe paves the way for a more strategic and mature relationship with the sector. It has also led to the formation of the VCS Steering Group who have provided invaluable insights in refreshing this strategy.

I need to give special thanks to Josephine McCartney, Chief Executive of Kent Community Foundation, who Chairs the Steering Group and has worked tirelessly as a representative of the sector over the last year, providing a point of contact and expertise on the sector to KCC throughout.

I would encourage anyone working within a voluntary or community organisation, a registered charity or social enterprise and the many volunteers and trustees across the county, to take part in this consultation. We want this strategy to continue the partnership working and collaboration we have seen over the last year. I therefore hope you can take the time to answer the short questionnaire and help us to shape this strategy into the future.

Mike Hill
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

Contents

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Definitions and Terminology

What do we mean by civil society?

By civil society, we mean all those individuals, informal and formal groups and organisations that operate outside of state control and for the primary purpose of social good. Whilst we recognise that private business can be socially motivated, this strategy focuses on those organisations that do not distribute profits and are not part of the statutory sector.

Whilst the VCSE or 'social sector' as we refer to it, is at the heart of a strong civil society we believe the terminology of civil society is important in establishing that social good happens outside of the state and in many different forms. This is not always through the traditional organisational structures, such as registered charities that we have referred to as the social sector. It also includes the more informal and often un-constituted community groups and individuals taking an active role in their local community, to improve their local area or champion a particular cause with a primary aim of delivering social good.

'Civil society' recognises the important independence of all individuals and organisations when undertaking activities for social good and distinguishes it from the state or the public sector. However, it is not possible to put firm boundaries around civil society, for example, we know that a proportion of the social sector is an important provider of KCC services and in that sense has a relationship with the state. This is though, a minority of organisations; most organisations and activities to deliver social good are not funded by KCC. In part, moving to a civil society strategy was to move away from the narrow view of the past, where KCC's relationship with the social sector has been funnelled through its funding and to recognise the vibrant civil society that exists in many forms across our communities independent of public sector funding.

Social sector

We have used the term 'social sector' in this strategy, where referring to the 'sector' as opposed to organisations. This is informed by engagement we have undertaken with the sector but also because we believe the term 'voluntary' sector can sometimes undervalue the economic contribution of charities and social enterprises to the local economy. It can also give the impression that the sector can deliver with little or minimal cost.

We also wanted to broaden out the definition of 'voluntary sector' to recognise the important contribution that social enterprises make to our local communities. Whilst fundamentally different from charities they share the objective to complete a social mission. The future relationship set out in this strategy, therefore, looks beyond structures of organisations and recognises that a strong civil society, in many forms is central to the concept of 'place' within our communities and makes an invaluable contribution to the Kent economy and society.

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Social enterprises have many definitions, but they generally have the following characteristics:

- They have an enshrined primary social or environmental mission (through legal form, governing documents, or ownership)

- They principally direct their surpluses towards that mission

- They are independent of government

- They primarily earn income through trading, selling goods or services.

(Hidden Revolution: Social Enterprise in 2018)

It is also important to point out that whilst there are many charities and social enterprises operating in the KCC area, which are not Kent based, this strategy very much focuses on the local. It is primarily concerned with the Kent based charities, community groups and social enterprises that are part of the Kent economy, that bring jobs and economic value into Kent and make up our local communities.

Introduction

This strategy recognises the role of civil society in Kent and sets out how Kent County Council (KCC) will work to support a strong and vibrant civil society across our communities. This strategy replaces our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) policy agreed in 2015 and is the first Civil Society Strategy for KCC.

We originally developed and consulted on this strategy in early 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. We subsequently decided to pause the development due to Covid and allow time to reflect on the challenges and impact of the last year. However, we believe that the importance of this strategy has only grown in the last year. Not only because of the incredible response we have seen from our communities, voluntary organisations, and local people but because of the undeniable impact the pandemic has and will continue to have on us as individuals, communities and as organisations and the need to recognise and respond to that.

Prior to this we had seen the publication of the first Government Civil Society Strategy and indeed a shift in areas of the voluntary sector, to more entrepreneurial models of operating – by this we mean diversification of income, trading and incorporating social enterprise models. The national strategy shift and the diversification of the sector informed our decision to broaden out the VCS policy into a new Civil Society Strategy. 'Civil Society' allowed us to recognise the contribution of both the registered charities and voluntary organisations but also the many informal groups and individual volunteers who play an important role in our communities. This also reflected the conversations we had with the sector since the publication of the VCS policy.

This direction still feels right; we have seen evidence of the resilience and innovation that exists both within the social sector and when our communities or 'civil society' come together. This strategy we hope celebrates that civic activity and community spirit and sets out our ambitions for the County Council's relationship with Civil Society in Kent.

Finally, but importantly this strategy sets out how we will support the social sector, not only through our funding practice such as our approach to grant funding but also through our funding of infrastructure support to the sector.

The KCC Civil Society strategy is an important document for the authority, reflecting the crucial role the social sector plays in achieving strong and resilient communities across our county. It is also a key strategy in delivering against the outcomes of the Council's *Interim Strategic plan.*

Aims and objectives of this strategy:

① a recognition of the contribution of civil society in Kent and the VCSE (the 'social sector') as a core part of that

② a commitment to supporting civil society to flourish

③ a commitment to a strategic relationship with the social sector that recognises its diversity and goes beyond those that have a financial relationship with the Council

④ a commitment to build on the partnership working we have seen over the last year between both public sector partners social sector, which recognises the sector as an equal partner

⑤ a commitment to support the social sector to be sustainable

⑥ a commitment to safeguarding the independence of VCSE organisations.

How will this strategy be used?

- to shape our relationship with civil society in the future and the social sector as a core part of that

- to provide a framework to guide the approach to the Council's engagement with the social sector

- to provide consistency in our approach to grant funding to the social sector

- to shape our commitment to an offer of support to the social sector, and the principles which underpin it including fair funding.

How will we measure our progress and success?

We will have succeeded when:

GOAL 1
The role of Civil society in Kent is well understood and valued

PRIORITIES
○ We advocate for and champion the social sector alongside partners.

○ We use data to understand the diversity and scale of the social sector in Kent.

○ We understand the sector's contribution to the local economy and in supporting communities.

○ We recognise the role of civil society in building community resilience within our strategies and plans.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through our dataset on the charity sector, which is annually reported on Kent.gov to look at the size, scale and financial health of sector.

Through our work with partners and other funders sharing intelligence and insights on the sector - using the Strategic Partnership Board as a vehicle to do this.

Through promotion of this strategy across the Council to provide a framework to inform future strategies and plans, where appropriate.

GOAL 2
The Social Sector in Kent is sustainable and innovative

PRIORITIES
○ The sector has access to a range of funding streams that support innovation not dependency and instability.

○ There is access to a good support model that helps organisations to diversify, adapt, and grow.

○ The infrastructure support available is responsive to the needs of the diverse organisations that exist.

○ We have good partnership working, which encourages innovation and collaboration to support individuals and our communities.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through the evaluation of our infrastructure support initiatives e.g., volunteering, Crowdfunding and feedback on the Strategic Recovery Fund.

Gathering feedback from the sector on our funded model of support as it develops longer term *(set out in section 3)*.

Through the work programme of the Strategic Partnership Board and VCSE Steering Group.

GOAL 3
The Social Sector's independence is upheld, and it has a strong voice to influence

PRIORITIES
○ We have the right engagement channels in place, which create a space for healthy challenge and discussion.

○ We recognise the diversity of the social sector through our engagement.

○ Our engagement is meaningful and not transactional.

○ We have a two-way flow of information, which enables informed engagement and better partnership working.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through working with the VCSE Steering Group and developing our engagement model based on sector feedback, ensuring it is diverse.

Through our future networking and engagement – allowing a space for engagement and healthy challenge

By working with partners such as NHS and district councils to ensure we create effective local and strategic engagement mechanisms.

National context

Policy landscape

When writing the first draft of this strategy in 2019, we would not have foreseen a pandemic and the additional challenges this then brought. However, these challenges have also presented opportunities; to rethink the way we work in partnership, how we meet demand, the way services are delivered across the public sector and indeed perhaps made us all re-evaluate what we value. The importance of social connections, our physical assets and green spaces have been strengthened over the last year as too has our sense of community.

We had already seen pre-Covid an increased desire for people to want to influence and have a say in the way services are run and in what happens in their local communities. However, the identification of place and a feeling of pride and connectedness to your local area has become increasingly important particularly as our worlds have shrunk to the very local at times over the last year.

A national civil society strategy

In 2018 the government published its first Civil Society Strategy, this set out a direction for government policy and the intention to strengthen the organisations, large and small which hold society together. It was complemented by the government's strategy on tackling loneliness, which set out how we can support strong connections between people. The Integrated Communities Green paper and subsequent action plan similarly focused on resilient and cohesive communities.

More recently the Prime Minister invited Danny Kruger MP to lead a piece of work to develop proposals on how to maximise the role of volunteers, community groups, faith groups, charities and social enterprise and contribute actively to the governments levelling up agenda. The subsequent report Levelling Up Our Communities was published in September 2020 and emphasised the importance of local connections, of empowering local people in their communities and the role of civil society. It also recognised the role of local government as convenor and enabler whilst needing to ensure that this does not inhibit the independent social action we should be supporting.

Financial health of the charity sector

Whilst civil society refers to a much broader group than charities, there is no single database of organisations and the most comprehensive available is the Charity Commission.

What we cannot yet tell is the impact of Covid on the long-term health of the sector. However, research carried out by Nottingham Trent University, NCVO

and Sheffield Hallam University[1] predicts that income from trading is expected to drop more than 17% next year and whilst 47% of respondents said their income had dropped, 31% have reported an increase in total income since last year; reflecting the Covid recovery funding that has been available. However, the extent of the longer-term impact of Covid varies significantly depending on the size, location and type of organisation and the real test will be as recovery funding comes to an end.

In terms of the charity sector's[2] overall health nationally, we can only base this on the last full set of charity accounts; the most recent data available at a national level is from 2017/18. Therefore, this data does not reflect the impact of the last year and should be read with some caution. This data is provided in *annex 1* of this strategy.

Social enterprise

There has been a diversification in the sector, with some charities setting up trading arms to free themselves from the constraints of public funding. Although charities are fundamentally different from social enterprises, they are both socially motivated. Social enterprises have grown in prominence over the last 20 years and particularly in the public sector landscape in the last decade, but their origins are much older. Social Enterprise UK reports that there has been a significant rise in community interest company (CIC) registration over the last 12 months[3]. By March 2021, the number of CICs grew to 23,839. There are however, around 100,000 social enterprises and the sector is worth £60bn to the UK economy and employs 2 million people (this includes co-operatives and building societies)[4]. They also estimate that 52% of social enterprises grew their turnover in the last 12 months (2019).

Over the last year despite acute challenges 65% of CIC's are now expecting to retain their position or grow (compared to all SMEs where around 50% expected turnover growth in the last 12 months), and only 1% expect to close (compared to 11% of business as a whole).

1 NTU-Covid-voluntary-sector-report-May-2021_DIGITAL.pdf (cpwop.org.uk)

2 this is based on the 'general charities' definition and does not include those that are not registered charities or social enterprises

3 SEUK-Year-of-COVID-report-v3.pdf (socialenterprise.org.uk)

4 Build-Back-Britain-Report-February-2021.pdf (socialenterprise.org.uk)

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Local context

Kent has a vibrant and diverse voluntary sector. **There are over 2,845 active voluntary organisations in Kent with a combined income of over £300m**[5]. The majority of organisations are micro and small in terms of income. In contrast to the national picture, there are no super-major organisations and income is concentrated in medium and large organisations as opposed to major. Charities are distributed unevenly with a concentration in major urban areas across individual districts. Sevenoaks has the highest number of registered charities per 1,000 residents and Dartford the lowest.

In real terms, the sector has seen an income increase of 5.8% since 2014/15, in cash terms, this is an increase of £15.5m[6].

KCC funds a significant number of VCSE organisations with a spend of around £124m[7] for a range of services, £7.2 m of this is currently in grant contributions. This is evidence of the significance of the VCSE in providing services and community based activities in Kent and the council is proud to work with the sector in this way as part of a diverse provider base.

Local data on social enterprises are less available, however, work undertaken by the Southeast Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)[8], estimated that between 4,500 and 6,300 social enterprises are trading in the SELEP area contributing £2.3bn to the economy. **For Kent and Medway, the estimated number of organisations is between 2,135 and 2,774. 44% of social enterprises in the area state they are improving a specific community and 28% supporting vulnerable people**[9]**, as their main objectives**[10].

Whilst the challenges of the last year cannot be underestimated a recent survey by Kent Community Foundation[11] has found that the confidence of organisations of being in operation in the future is up with 76% of respondents saying they are 100% confident they will still be in operation in March 2022, this is compared to 68% in a previous survey undertaken in November 2020. However, the demand for services has also continued to rise and ¼ of those who said it had increased say they had been unable to meet the demand. The road ahead we know will be difficult and we will inevitably lose some organisations, but the resilience of the social sector in Kent has been clearly demonstrated over the last year more than ever.

5 KCC VCS annual report 2021 based on 'general charities definition, based on those who are registered in Kent and on 2018-19 data, some charities have not filed accounts for this period so data may be incomplete.

6 KCC VCS annual report 2021, based on those organisations which have been registered for the full 5 years and submitted accounts for the full 5 years

7 KCC 2020-21 spend, includes all payments for services and grants to registered charities, community interest companies, industrial and provident societies

8 Social Enterprise – a Prospectus, (2019) South East Local Enterprise Partnership

9 This is based on data from Social Enterprise, 2017, Social Enterprise UK and relates to East Sussex and Kent

10 This is based on data from Social Enterprise, 2017, Social Enterprise UK and relates to East Sussex and Kent

11 Kent Community Foundation Survey of Kent's Charitable Sector (kentcf.org.uk)

The Kent Partners Compact

The National Compact, the agreement which governs relations between the government and civil society organisations in England and set the direction for local compacts, was last updated in 2010. Since then, the government has committed to renewing its commitment to the principles of the Compact, however, this has yet to happen and feels unlikely to be forthcoming given other pressures.

In the past, our relationship and engagement with the sector were defined solely through the Kent Partners Compact, first agreed in 2009 and which was refreshed in 2012. The VCS policy in 2015 endorsed the principles of the Compact but recognised the need to go beyond this and indeed to review what was now a very out of date document.

The Kent Partners Compact was a partnership document signed by KCC on behalf of public sector partners. This strategy sets out KCC's relationship with the sector and is not intended to speak for our partners.

We believe that the Kent Partners Compact, some twelve years since it was first published does not reflect the current climate. It does not portray how the social sector or public sector has evolved, or the relationship we are striving to establish with the sector, importantly it also does not recognise legislation such as the Social Value Act, 2012, which has been adopted since it was agreed. In the initial consultation on the draft strategy in 2020 of the 69 respondents, 47 agreed that we should close the Compact and include the principles in this strategy. 21 answered 'do not know' and only 1 disagreed.

We have therefore decided to replace the Compact with this strategy as we believe that the principles within the Compact are embedded or sit within legislation such as the Best Value Duty.

KCC is committed to upholding the Best Value Duty and will adhere to the principle of three months' notice on funding decisions as is also set out in the National Compact.

"An authority intending to reduce or end funding (where 'funding' means both grant funding and any fixed term contract) or other support to a voluntary and community organisation or small business should give at least three months' notice of the actual reduction to both the organisation involved and the public/service users".

(Best Value revised guidance 2015)

In essence, the Compact sought to achieve good financial practice, recognition of an independent sector and a relationship that is based on respect and understanding. All of these commitments are fundamental principles and objectives of this strategy. We, therefore, believe the relationship set out in this strategy and the support offer described harnesses the principles of what the National Compact sought to achieve but in a way that is relevant and reflects the current environment.

Chapter 1

People

Whilst civil society is independent of the state a proportion of the social sector is an important provider of publicly funded services to individuals on our behalf. However, the role of civil society in supporting people is broader than that; it often provides that wider safety net, supporting people in our communities outside of state support.

During our consultation people described civil society as 'people coming together to support each other, ensuring our communities are inclusive'. It is through the social action of individuals within our communities that social connections are often created that are vital to improving our wellbeing.

Social Sector as a provider of services

A small proportion of the social sector in Kent provide services on behalf of the Council. These services are significant and may be supporting children, young people, and older people, and indeed some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Whilst the number of charities delivering services in this way in Kent is relatively small against the totality of the sector, financially this is a significant amount of KCC spend, with approximately £124m[12] spent in the VCSE sector for a range of services, support, and community interventions.

The social sector has become increasingly engaged in the delivery of public services over the last 20 years and the relationship between the state and social sector has therefore become deeply entwined. Through community wellbeing and preventative services, the sector plays an important role in supporting older people in their homes and within their local community. The social sector also provides specialist services such as mental health services, services for disabled children, people with learning disabilities and young people through youth services or activities for younger people. They are also a vital provider of specialist drug and alcohol support services. In all of these services the sector often provides the innovative solutions to some of the most challenging issues, which later can later become mainstream approaches embedded by local authorities.

12 KCC 2020-21 spend, includes all payments for services and grants to registered charities, community interest companies, industrial and provident societies and mutuals.

Demand on the social sector post Covid

The financial impact of the pandemic on the social sector is yet to be fully realised, however we know that demand for support from VCSE organisations has increased over the last year, with the latest survey from Kent Community Foundation showing a 70% increase in demand[13], whilst resources to meet this have reduced.

We know that in addition to providing contracted services, the sector often provides a 'safety net' outside of state support and that many of the population groups the sector supports will have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. Covid not only had an unequal impact on population health, for example, Black & ethnic minority groups had between 10 and 50% higher risk of death from Covid and Bangladeshi twice the risk of death than White British, but we also know that certain population groups are more at risk from the long-term wider impacts of the pandemic. This includes people with learning disabilities, care home residents, informal carers, those in low paid employment, vulnerable children, people in the justice system, people with mental health conditions, people living in poverty and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups.

Community groups and VCSE organisations have been a lifeline to many over the last year; providing support to people who are shielding and isolated and will need to continue to support communities to build back. Many charities will also offer the more formal services to people dealing with the longer-term impact Covid has had on their lives. The needs in our communities may look different because of the last year and it will take time to fully understand the impact, but the sector is a central part of that wider safety net that supports our communities. It is therefore right that this strategy does not focus solely on the sector as a provider of publicly funded services but also the innovative support and solutions the sector can bring to meet the complex challenges, that sit outside of the local authority's direct remit.

Social responsibility

Integral to a thriving civil society are the countless individuals who volunteer, whether this is by setting up and running activities that bring people together, championing the needs of their local community or serving as trustees.

The volunteer effort during the pandemic has been monumental, whilst many volunteers had to shield, new volunteers stepped up and the volunteer infrastructure played a central role in supporting those shielding in Kent as well as in the vaccination effort, which continues. As an example, during 2020 Ashford Volunteer Centre alone had 796 people who wanted to volunteer and who formally registered for volunteering.

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13 Kent Community Foundation Survey of Kent's Charitable Sector (kentcf.org.uk)

However, the role of volunteers is not something we should only celebrate during a crisis; volunteers are the backbone of the many community organisations that exist day to day. We want to ensure that people are empowered to take part in their communities going forward in the same way they have over the last year.

Around a quarter of the population formally volunteer[14] and there is evidence that being involved in volunteering is beneficial for people's health[15]. There are around 19,000 volunteers within major, large, and medium-sized charities in Kent. This figure is significant; however, it does not include the many volunteers running the small and micro charities and organisations embedded in local communities. However, to empower people to contribute, volunteering needs to be flexible and innovative so that it fits around different life circumstances. It is also important that we encourage young people to take part in social action or to volunteer particularly as we know that younger adults aged 16-24 years old are at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.

It is very often small groups and organisations that are involved in shaping our local communities. They contrast with the more formally constituted, larger charities and are often completely funded by donations and fundraising and led by volunteers. However, it is this that grounds them in their local communities. They respond to a need for as long as it exists, it is self-defined and determined. **We want to encourage people within their communities to respond in this way and ensure that Kent is a place that supports and values this type of civic activity.**

Our offer of support to the sector set out in Chapter 3, is in part therefore aimed at supporting volunteering infrastructure and grassroots, community activities and organisations that evolve organically and the many volunteers who are integral to them.

14 HM Government, (2018) A connected society, a strategy for tackling loneliness. London: Government Publications

15 Public Health England/NHS England, (2015), Health and Wellbeing: A guide to Community-centred approaches

Chapter 2

Place

Civil society enhances the places we live in. It provides opportunities for diverse communities to meet, it celebrates the history and heritage of our local areas, creates social networks through shared spaces and activities that people value. A sense of place and identity is important to people. People want their local area to be thriving and the physical spaces and community assets are an important part of this. The community buildings, activities and green spaces are all part of what makes our local area and have provided much respite over the last year.

Kent is a diverse county, spanning from the North Downs to the East Coast; rural countryside in the Weald to the urban areas of North Kent; traditional market towns and villages to planned garden communities at Otterpool and Ebbsfleet. Kent has a strong identity, but it also has distinct identities found within this large county and it is the connections within these unique places that make a community.

Social sector and the local economy

Increasingly as public service policy requires a collaborative place-based approach, civil society must be part of the conversation. The needs of places can be represented by insights from local communities but also the social sector, which is a significant part of the local economy. This is particularly important in a county the size of Kent, that we can hear from the diverse communities that exist.

The social sector makes a significant contribution to the local economy, creating vibrant and diverse places whilst reinvesting back into their communities. Registered charities and social enterprises are a significant employer in Kent, estimates for the southeast state that there are 44,000-62,000 people employed in social enterprises (this data is not available at Kent level). Meanwhile registered charities in Kent with an income of over £500K, employ around 8,799 people and the sector contributes £300m to the local economy. Many social enterprises employ people who could not work in the mainstream labour market, with 44% of social enterprises nationally employing people from disadvantaged communities[16]. They are also more likely to be led by and recruit staff from the BAME backgrounds, although there is still evidence of limitations within the sector[17]. The social value of this should not be overlooked especially given the positive impact we know employment has on wellbeing.

Nationally the charity sector spends 86% of its income on charitable activities or their core mission, which in turn creates investment within our local area. For Kent's charities, this means £258m of its £300m income is potentially spent on charitable activities in our communities.

The contribution of volunteers cannot be overlooked, with around 19,000 volunteers in Kent supporting major large and medium-sized charities. However, this does not include the countless volunteers running, very often without paid staff, small and micro-organisations across our communities. The value of formal volunteering is estimated to be around £23.9bn (2016) nationally according to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The significant contribution volunteering has as a route to paid employment must also not be overlooked.

It is therefore important that we ensure the voice of the social sector is heard within the local economy as a significant contributor. When we talk about growth in Kent this must be inclusive and hearing the voice of the social sector will help us to achieve this, given that many of these organisations represent and very often employ, those who are most disadvantaged in our communities. We will work through our engagement with partners to advocate for this across the different engagement forums that exist.

Resilient communities – tackling social isolation

If resilience is measured by a community's capability to cope with uncertainty and change, then our communities across Kent have shown great resilience over the last year. We have seen that building resilience is very often best achieved at the local level. What makes communities resilient is as diverse and complex as the communities themselves; whilst the state plays a role in this it is also the myriad of local organisations, community networks and trusted engagement channels, the community leaders, and local volunteers. It is all these that have helped to provide local 'resilience' over the last year but more importantly will continue to do so.

It is often civil society that is closest to the ground and nurtures relationships, it helps to connect people across diverse communities; helping to combat loneliness and social isolation. For an area such as Kent with its many rural communities there are also particular challenges in terms of isolation, accessibility, and connectivity and the active communities in these areas offer important support networks to local people. It is this informal infrastructure that sprang into action quickly during the early days of the pandemic and provided that much needed support to those shielding or isolated. Whilst we knew the importance of this and the detrimental impact of loneliness before, the pandemic shone a light even further into the vital role of community support and the importance of local connections. Whilst formal structures by their nature took time to respond, the informal had already galvanised.

16 State of Social Enterprise, 2017 Social Enterprise UK
17 SEUK-Year-of-COVID-report-v3.pdf (socialenterprise.org.uk)

Social isolation and loneliness are societal issues and can only be combated by a partnership approach - civil society is just one part of the solution. However, civil society is increasingly seen as a central partner in many areas of public policy for example, within the delivery of adult social care and health services. Social prescribing, which refers people to community-based activities and organisations is not a new idea but has seen increasing emphasis within the NHS in helping people, particularly those with long term conditions to stay well or improve their wellbeing. GPs also report that they see between 1 and 5 people a day who have presented mainly because they are lonely[18]. Linking people through social prescribing to existing community groups and activities that are inclusive of people from a range of backgrounds, can help to combat loneliness and support people with long term conditions to stay well or be more resilient.

Within adult social care, there has been a focus for some time on the networks of support that exist within communities and the part that plays in creating innovative ways of supporting people. But also, the preventative effect that access to informal support and networks can have on individuals and their need for more formal support.

Whilst these policy solutions rely upon a vibrant civil society, this social infrastructure does not exist primarily to meet the needs of the public sector. There cannot, therefore, be an expectation that it will be able to meet a greater level of demand without access to the right support and a range of funding sources to enable activities and community support to continue to play an important role.

We know there is a broad spectrum of organisations across our communities such as sports and arts organisations and local groups, some of which may be registered charities or social enterprises but all of which provide opportunities for people to connect and support each other. This strategy marks our commitment to working to ensure that we support the 'social infrastructure' in our communities and that we work with partners to tackle social isolation collectively. This also includes working across the County Council in a way that recognises and seeks to support our communities to be resilient; by working in partnership and collaborating both internally and externally with partners and civil society itself.

We have seen now perhaps in ways less visible before, that a thriving civil society is central to supporting people in their communities, when they need it most. We must ensure that we build on this and that the ability for people to act; for organisations and individuals to be empowered to play an important role within our communities, is not reserved for a pandemic and lost as we move forward.

18 Jo Cox Commission on loneliness (2017) Combatting Loneliness One Conversation at a time: A Call to Action, London.

Case Study:

CROWDFUND **KENT**
Your projects. Our communities. Kent's recovery

Over the last year we have launched the CrowdFund Kent programme, an idea we investigated in 2019 but accelerated due to Covid. This £500K Fund now forms part of our support offer to the sector and was launched in March 2021 and will run as a pilot for two years, which we will evaluate.

This programme has shown the innovation that exists within our communities, the dedication of local people to drive forward projects in their local area and the support that can be galvanised within our communities be that through residents or local businesses in backing ideas that are important to the local community. This fund is not about supporting services directed by the County Council, it is about local ideas and innovation that respond to local challenges or simply bring people together to improve their local area and build community resilience from the ground up. It also enables local people to be involved in their local area by backing and supporting local projects that matter to them.

The role of community assets

The assets within our communities, whether that be physical assets such as community spaces, sports clubs, or activities run by local people, all play an important part in making our communities diverse and in bringing people together. These assets provide a shared space, a place for people from a range of backgrounds to meet and socialise and in so doing provide the connections that help to improve our wellbeing. Often these assets are run by organisations anchored in civil society, owned by the community they are set up to support and developed organically. We want to ensure that communities are empowered to take control to respond to needs within their communities and to take a place-shaping role.

We also know the importance of green spaces and parks for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. These spaces are at the heart of our communities, and we know they are important to local people; they can create a sense of identity to a place and help bring people together to combat social isolation. Very often the local community are the driving force behind these assets, they can be mobilised by community leaders and supported by volunteers passionate about their local environment and we have seen many examples of this in our CrowdFund Kent programme.

We know that many community spaces have been closed during the pandemic and indeed some charities and community groups have chosen to give up

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space to save costs. However, there is a need for access to community space as we move back to some face-to-face delivery and as people want to enjoy the activities they previously did. How we utilise assets in the community to enable this alongside using digital solutions is something we will need to continue to explore.

KCC has many pivotal physical assets within our communities and has a community leadership role to play in helping shape places and spaces for people across Kent. *Our Future Assets programme* will support us to reimagine our community services and digital and physical presence in communities, working closely with our partners and creating modern, flexible and sustainable spaces which will contribute to our net zero commitments. We want to ensure that these are accessible and inclusive for local community groups and the social sector, offering a space for people to meet or to use these assets to deliver activities. We will also look at how the KCC estate alongside partners including the social sector, can offer a flexible space to support local community infrastructure and in so doing, offer further opportunities for partnership and collaboration within a community or 'place'.

Community activities and resources for young people

Youth services had already become an increasing priority nationally, however the impact of the pandemic on Children and Young people has reinforced this agenda. Whilst experiences will have varied, the disruption to the lives of young people has undoubtedly been significant over the last year.

The *Kent Reconnect Children and Young People's Programme* invites the whole Kent community to join together to provide a range of exciting and supportive opportunities for children and young people during the period to end of August 2022. This programme is an example of recognising the power of local organisations and communities in bringing young people together, to re-engage alongside statutory partners but also the wealth of skills and resources embedded in our local communities.

Kent has a younger age profile than the national average with a greater proportion of young people aged 5-19 years than England. We know that Children and Young People, especially those vulnerable children and those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Events are more likely to be at risk of a long-term wider impacts of Covid. Now more than ever, we must ensure that our communities provide the spaces for young people to develop their skills, networks, and resilience that are positive for their life chances and wellbeing.

Uniformed youth services such as the Scouts, play an important role for many young people as do open access to youth services and district early help hubs. However, we want to support a diverse portfolio of community-based activities. We know that very often the most effective and responsive support for young people is embedded in their local communities and delivered by trusted people in the local community.

We need to create the right conditions to ensure there is a community-based offer of activities for young people that is led by the community and meets the needs of a diverse population. This must include ensuring organisations that support vulnerable and disadvantaged young people can continue to support them into positive activities, steering them away from negative influences into holistic activities such as art, music, sports. We know the importance of civil society and VCSE organisations in supporting all young people and that the best outcomes for all will be achieved by empowering and working alongside our communities and those who are active in supporting the young people within them.

In addition to the programmes of work underway across the authority aimed at supporting young people, our support to the sector, as outlined in Chapter 3, recognises the need to support a diverse range of organisations in Kent. This will help organisations to grow, sustain community-based activities and support our community assets.

Supporting the Social Sector

This strategy is not just a document, it is our future commitment to supporting the social sector as a core part of civil society. In this chapter, we set out the range of ways we will do this, including through our investment in infrastructure support, with an agreed budget over the 3-year life of the strategy.

Whilst not a statutory requirement, this is a political priority for the County Council and there is budget commitment for 'infrastructure support' over the life of this strategy. Our *Interim Strategic Plan* set out this commitment to:

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.

We know that there are many strengths in the sector and not all organisations will require support. That is why our funding will be a contribution to infrastructure support; to support organisations where additional support is **needed** against the objectives we have set out. We believe it is important that we contribute to the infrastructure support required by some to help them to adapt and grow to meet the challenges of the future. However, our support is not intended to create dependency or to be paternalistic but to play a role in supporting a sustainable and independent social sector and vibrant civil society in Kent.

Kent has a diverse and large social sector spanning across 12 districts, made up of micro and small local organisations and larger organisations that may cover multiple geographical areas. There is not one single organisation that can advocate for or support such a diverse sector; however, we are committed to developing the right model of support that works for the needs of Kent organisations. This will involve working with organisations that currently provide that support in a way that is sustainable and creating new ways of supporting the sector, where gaps in support are identified.

The support considerations and objectives set out in this chapter are therefore based upon the unique needs of Kent and the ongoing dialogue and engagement with the sector since 2015 and particularly over the last year.

What do we mean by infrastructure support?

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), who are the national membership body for local sector support and development organisations (infrastructure), sets out the following aims for infrastructure support:

- Every community in England benefits from a thriving local voluntary sector, strengthened through excellent local support and development.

- Any person in England that wants to volunteer, start a charity or social enterprise, or create a voluntary organisation has a place to go for good, local, advice and support.

- Our members have a clear voice, effective influence and engaged support amongst key stakeholders, locally and nationally.

We believe that this underpins what we want to create for Kent and the direction set out in this strategy. However, we want to go further than this so that organisations across diverse communities and of different sizes can contribute to a thriving civil society. Our infrastructure offer in this sense is not about simply supporting those who we fund or work with, it is much more than that. It is also not only about organisational support or access to business support, but is about engagement, with the sector having a voice and being able to influence.

Objectives of KCC support for the social sector:

① **Establishing a strategic relationship with the social sector - so that it can effectively engage and influence**

② **Enabling a sustainable, diverse, and independent social sector in Kent, which can grow and develop**

③ **Enabling a coordinated, properly resourced, and sustainable volunteering system across the county**

④ **Creating the right conditions for small community organisations to respond to communities' needs and for communities to be empowered.**

Delivering our infrastructure support offer

For 2021/22 we have allocated funding to respond to immediate needs post Covid, informed by engagement with the sector and the Action Plan developed by the VCS Recovery Cell. These interim arrangements are also to reflect that the ongoing support offer will sit alongside the framework set out in this strategy, once agreed. However, we will use the learning from the interim arrangements to help us shape the ongoing support offer and the funding mechanisms we use to deliver it be that contract, grants or a hybrid of arrangements. Thereafter the committed budget to support this strategy will be used to deliver against the objectives set out over the life of the strategy.

Establishing a strategic relationship with the social sector - so that it can effectively engage and influence

During the development of the VCS policy in 2015, the sector told us that they wanted opportunities to network with similar VCSE organisations but also businesses and the public sector. As a result, we established cross-sector networking events twice a year and these were very successful and well attended. When initially developing this strategy in 2019 we wanted to build on this and expand these networks to establish an engagement mechanism that is ongoing and based on mutual respect and allows a free flow of information and exchange of ideas.

However, over the last year our engagement and partnership working has been much improved; a positive outcome of a challenging year. We have put in place forums working with the sector, aimed at improving our engagement with the VCSE and to ensure that engagement is meaningful and timely.

We established a VCS Strategic Partnership Board in January 2021, which is attended by KCC, Districts, NHS Kent and Medway CCG and representation from the VCSE. This Board is an informal board, by that we mean not part of the formal decision making of the County Council but has become a significant and important forum for discussions on cross cutting issues where VCSE organisations are a key partner. This Board was set up to continue the partnership working we have seen over the last year and recognise that the social sector is a key partner. It is starting to enable a flow of information and discussion on key strategic issues from across partners.

The meeting is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services and the Leader of the Council has a standing invite; the Board is focused on providing an engagement mechanism between statutory agencies and the social sector, beyond those we fund or have contractual relationships with. It provides a place to discuss key strategic issues and risks impacting on the social sector and the beneficiaries it supports. It is also a forum for healthy challenge between partners and the sector and provides a space to discuss strategy and plans with a mature and open dialogue.

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Alongside this we agreed to establish a VCSE Steering Group, which is chaired by the sector and comprised of representatives from a range of organisations. This sits independently to the Board, but it is intended for the Board to recommend and take items for discussion to the Group and for the Group to highlight issues back to the Board; to enable a two-way communication channel.

These arrangements were put in place as a direct result of the engagement we have undertaken over the last year and whilst much progress has been made and these arrangements are proving very effective, we recognise that they can still be improved.

We do not have one single infrastructure organisation in Kent, which advocates for and engages across the sector; we are working perhaps within an imperfect model or a realistic one given the size and diversity of the County and sector. However, the work we have undertaken over the last year means that our engagement mechanisms are much improved from when we adopted the VCS Policy in 2015 and we are now developing a model that works for the unique needs of Kent. We committed to continuing to work with the Board and Steering Group to consider how this model can evolve alongside our partners such as the NHS and district councils. Particularly, we will work with the Steering Group to consider how it can become more established as an engagement forum for the sector. In response to consultation feedback, we will work with the Chair to evolve the membership and terms of the Group to ensure it is well recognised by the sector and creates an engagement mechanism to the wider sector, extending its reach. Whilst it can never represent a sector that is diverse, and which can never speak entirely with one voice; we can strengthen its representation. The representatives on the Group must be actively sharing information back out and representing the sector, not their organisation for this Group to continue to be an effective mechanism for the County to Council to engage with.

This equally requires us as a County Council to consider how we can support this forum without undermining its independence, recognising the time and commitment it requires from organisations who very often have limited resources; we do not want this to be a barrier to organisations engaging and stifling the diversity of representation.

However, alongside this we want to ensure that through our engagement mechanisms, we can be informed about the range of organisations and activities that people value within our communities, that are driven by local people, and which operate entirely independently. We believe we can have a role in supporting forums where collaboration can take place, with a range of organisations meeting in informal settings this could be in person, but we will also explore the use of digital, taking lessons from the last year.

It is not for the Council to force organisations that are independent to collaborate, but we can have a role in convening and creating the right environment that can make collaboration a possibility alongside partners and

we will work with them to consider how we can best support or tap into local forums.

Organisations have reported that they have pulled together during the pandemic, with 40% saying they had collaborated with other third-party organisations more than they usually would[19] and we want to build on this. This may not be best delivered by the County Council, but we can use our infrastructure budget to help facilitate this and we will consider how best we can achieve this alongside the development of the Board and Steering Group.

19 Kent Community Foundation Survey of Kent's Charitable Sector (kentcf.org.uk)

Enabling a sustainable, diverse, and independent social sector in Kent, which can grow and develop

Our offer of support to the sector will enable the social sector in Kent to be sustainable and its independence upheld. Whilst KCC has a role in supporting the sector to achieve this, our support funding will always be a contribution to help organisations to access support at critical times or to help them evolve; it is not on-going support.

We recognise that recent times have been incredibly turbulent for organisations and that to meet the challenges ahead will require organisations to rethink strategies and plans. The importance of organisations being able to access funding through a diverse range of sources is not only important to upholding the sector's independence but also creates more financial resilience.

We recognise the diversity in the sector and that to support organisations to grow and diversify means recognising that the needs are varied and cannot be met by one single organisation. Whilst there are some similarities between social enterprises to Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO), to registered charities and community groups, there are also many more distinctions between them. There are also differences in the needs of small to medium to large organisations. Therefore, our support offer in relation to sector sustainability, diversity and growth must reflect the range of needs and be flexible enough to meet them.

We put in place the Strategic Recovery Fund in 2020 and are repeating this in 2021, working with Kent Community Foundation. This £300K Fund (per round) offered small grants for organisations to then buy in support, capacity, or expertise to help them to diversify and adapt post Covid. Access to this type of 'business support' was indeed ranked a priority in the original consultation on this strategy in 2020. This fund is primarily about access to support, to develop organisational and financial plans, to improve digital skills, diversify funding and leadership and board development. The fund is demand led and therefore the range of support that grant recipients access, the organisations they use to deliver support and the impact this has will be used to inform our ongoing support offer and how best this should be delivered. We will also ensure we work with colleagues from across the Council who may also be delivering similar support for example, funding that is available for Business Growth to social enterprises and trading charities.

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However, using the information and insights we have to date we expect the future business support element of our infrastructure offer to be focused on access to the following:

Organisational support and development

It is not always clear to organisations who is best to go to for support, and trusted advice, especially advice that is sympathetic to the specific needs of the social sector. This may be for support to set up an organisation, or advice on governance to develop and organisation but also to rethink strategies to develop an existing organisation.

In recent years there has been a focus on 'blended funding', diversifying income through a mix of contracts, grants, and social finance or loans and we recognise that some organisations have embraced this. However, diversifying income requires the time, capacity, and skills of people within organisations to plan business models, identify funding and complete applications or indeed undertake procurement processes. Access to the right expertise to support an organisation through those processes, whether that is taking social finance, a loan or going through a public procurement process can be invaluable.

However, we know that for many organisations time and capacity for their employees to focus on this is an issue and paying for expertise and support may not always be easy to justify when there are pressing demands on budgets. We appreciate that for the smallest organisations in our communities some financial models and funding may never be appropriate, but we also know that many are working with very low or no reserves and are therefore financially less resilient and most at risk of closure. For these organisations access to good organisational and financial advice is even more important as is expertise around public procurement and fundraising.

We also know that for some organisations there are additional barriers to accessing funding, for example the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) recently launched *The Phoenix Fund*, a community-led fund co-designed and co-led by community leaders from across Black and Minoritised groups in England, designed to target groups that had no previous engagement; 65 % of the organisations that applied to the fund had no previous history with the NLCF.

There are both lessons to be taken from this in terms of the way funders ensure their funds are accessible but also the additional and appropriate support that some charities and community groups may need to access funding from a range of sources.

We will therefore embed access to a diverse range of organisational support and advice, including developing funding strategies and diversifying income, in our infrastructure offer.

Leadership skills and training

We know that for organisations to grow or adapt they need strong leadership and that many organisations may have seen changes in their leadership and staffing over the last year. The Trustees and Chief Executives of the many VCSE organisations across Kent need to be able to access the support, mentoring and training they need to drive forward their organisation. They also need to ensure that the organisation is well run, complying with regulation and that effective approaches are in place to support equality, diversity, and inclusion an agenda that has grown in importance particularly over the last year.

Every organisation that delivers charitable activities must also safeguard volunteers, staff members, participants, and donors. Organisations must be run in a way that actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying abuse, and neglect. It is important that all organisations do safeguarding well and that they create a safe environment where everyone is respected and valued. We need to ensure that leaders of organisations can access the support and guidance they need to strengthen safeguarding practice.

We will therefore look at how we can support access to leadership training but also training and support for Board development and this will be informed by the impact monitoring and data we receive through the Strategic Recovery Fund.

Digital

Digital had increasingly become a vital way to transform organisations, making them more efficient. We also know that digital platforms can offer many opportunities and indeed for many small grassroots organisations, social media may have contributed to their set up attracting people to get behind a local cause. However, the use of digital communication channels has become important in the last year, in ways we could never really have imagined.

Technology has proved vitally important in helping people to be connected and to deliver services to beneficiaries. Previously digital skills were not something all VCSE organisations had access to or have previously prioritised but over the last year the majority of organisations in Kent reported that they moved online and 60% state they will continue to do so.[20]

It is worth acknowledging that not all services will continue to be delivered online; whilst the last year has proved the importance of digital platforms, it has also shown us how much we value face to face and human contact. Indeed, many organisations that reported continuing to deliver online also reported Covid restrictions as a barrier to returning to face to face; once these are lifted many are likely to want to move to in person or at least a hybrid arrangement. However, digital skills are about much more than delivering services online, the use of digital is also a way of engaging supporters, of reaching out to communities and fundraising.

20 Kent Community Foundation Survey of Kent's Charitable Sector (kentcf.org.uk)

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We will, therefore, embed access to digital skills, be that social media support, website development or upskilling staff, as a part of our infrastructure support going forward. We believe that any infrastructure offer to the sector must recognise the need for digital skills and be able to offer that support to VCSE organisations going forward to be effective.

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Enabling a coordinated, properly resourced, and sustainable volunteering system across the county

This strategy has set out the many ways that volunteers are integral to civil society and the importance of enabling social action. Whilst the volunteer effort over the last year, be that informal or formal volunteering must be recognised for its incredible contribution, volunteers quietly play an important part in our communities every day. Be that Trustees, those leading small community groups or supporting voluntary organisations in the delivery of support to their beneficiaries.

However, we know that recruiting and retaining volunteers takes time and resources and that the ground swell of volunteer action we have seen will subside. Voluntary organisations often struggle to recruit volunteers, indeed 43% of organisations in the recent Kent Community Foundation survey stated that they would struggle to recruit volunteers in the coming months[21]. Support for volunteers was also ranked a priority by responders in the 2020 consultation on this strategy.

The VCS Recovery Cell Action Plan set out a commitment to look at how we can create a sustainable model of volunteering infrastructure across the County to ensure that organisations can access the support they need to recruit and retain volunteers and that volunteers can find opportunities that meet their needs.

As a County Council we have funded volunteer infrastructure in different ways in the past and many district councils continue to fund their local volunteer centres, where they exist. However, there has not been a consistent offer of volunteer infrastructure support across the County for some time and the model of volunteer centres has changed alongside funding changes. By volunteer infrastructure we mean support to recruit and retain volunteers (volunteer brokerage) and access to the guidance and advice needed to support this.

Across a County the size of Kent we know that there is a need for access to good support at a local level, however the model of support also needs to be sustainable and offer a consistent standard of guidance, resources, and training across the County. It also needs to be able to promote volunteering, attracting volunteers into opportunities across the range of organisations that exist within Kent. It also should be able to capture data in a consistent way to show the value of volunteering.

21 Kent Community Foundation Survey of Kent's Charitable Sector (kentcf.org.uk)

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We have committed to funding a pilot on volunteering infrastructure across the County for 12 months starting in 2021. This funding will be used to help to develop a sustainable model of support, which encourages volunteering and provides good quality and consistent support and guidance required to effectively recruit and retain volunteers. This pilot will not necessarily mean funding an organisation in every district but will look to develop a local presence across the County in a sustainable way; in some cases that may mean organisations covering more than one area as is the case in some areas currently. It will be a starting point and will build on the good practice that exists, avoiding duplication. The pilot will be delivered by Ashford Volunteer Centre as the lead organisation working with the other locality-based volunteer infrastructure organisations in partnership.

We will evaluate the pilot, and we will alongside the grant recipients review the findings to inform the best way to deliver the model going forward. However, our funding for this pilot and the ongoing model will be a contribution; intended to help leverage funding from other partners and funders in the County or to supplement income models. The value and contribution volunteering infrastructure makes to our communities and the benefits this brings is not isolated to the County Council. We hope we can use the finding of this evaluation to work with partners and other funders to support the model developed going forward.

Creating the right conditions for small community organisations to respond to communities' needs and for communities to be empowered

We want our support to the sector to focus on creating the right environment for civil society to flourish, supporting activities or innovations in our communities, which help to create a sense of place and identity across our communities.

We recognise that community organisations are often small and led by one or two leaders within the local community. These organisations are organic and grow from a need often recognised at the very local level. It is these organisations that can support the diversity in our communities and often represent those that may feel their voice is not heard. These organisations may also provide a place for young people to meet and take part in positive activities or provide people with social networks that improve their lives and wellbeing.

These organisations are not always set within traditional charity structures, they may be micro charities but equally, they may be un-constituted associations and groups. They may also be led by people from diverse backgrounds be that Black and Minority Ethnic groups or by people with the lived experiences of the beneficiaries they support.

Organisations such as these are doing incredible things in our communities but are often operating under challenging circumstances and on the goodwill of volunteers or a very small number of paid staff. We think it is important that we understand the community-led activities and groups that contribute to the quality of life of our residents. The independence of these organisations should not be compromised; we do not want to interfere, but we would like to ensure that the right conditions exist in Kent for people to be empowered to act in their local area. Some of this support may come through the organisational/business support already described or through our engagement channels in the future but we have also been supporting these organisations and activities through our CrowdFund Kent programme.

The Crowdfund Kent programme is a pilot for 2 years and is currently focused on supporting Covid Recovery. The funding for this pilot is currently in addition to our infrastructure support budget.

We will be evaluating this pilot and will use the findings of that evaluation to either expand the CrowdFund Kent programme and embed it in our infrastructure offer or use the learning to develop an alternative way to support community led organisations and activities that support the objectives of this strategy. We will also be continuing to reach out to partners and other funders, including businesses to see how they can support the CrowdFund Kent programme.

Crowdfunding has enabled us to have a greater awareness of activities and projects that are at the micro level, being delivered by local people with a passion for their local area or cause. It has also leveraged significant funding into the County, with KCC only one of many contributors to a project. The projects are not intended to deliver KCC services or to be for the sole benefit of KCC but to support community led and community backed ideas. Crowdfunding projects must be able to show the benefit for the wider community to be successful and this programme has shown the wide community support that does exist for local initiatives. By that we mean the many residents and local businesses that have got behind campaigns and supported initiatives in their local area.

Fair Funding as an enabler to a sustainable social sector

Our infrastructure offer is one way of supporting the sector, but our own funding practices must equally support not destabilise the sector. If these are right, then it will enable continued diversity in those that deliver services funded by the Council but also help to ensure our grants and contracts are accessible to a wide range of organisations, without creating dependency and threatening the independence of some organisations.

Our processes around funding must take into consideration the time and resources it takes for organisations to apply be that grants or contracts. Where possible, funding should be over the medium term to allow time for ideas to be tested, embedded and to create some stability. We must also adhere to the Best Value Duty and uphold the principles of reasonable notice periods on funding decisions.

Commissioning

It is through our commissioning process that we should establish and continually assess the best mechanism for delivering and funding services, whether that is grants or contracts or a mix of both. The grant funding framework set out later in this strategy is therefore inherently linked to our commissioning practice.

Our commissioning approach has evolved since the VCS policy in 2015 and we are now looking at how this model should develop in the future to ensure that commissioning has a greater emphasis on locality and to look at how our commissioning can work with communities to build resilience and improve the focus on place. This is in recognition that often the real added value is found at the local level and the need to build more collaborative commissioning arrangements.

Whilst this strategy is not a commissioning document nor is it focused solely on the relationship with providers of services funded by the Council, the significance of KCC's spend with VCSE organisations means it is an integral part of our relationship. How we fund and the process and decisions we make as a Council ultimately do impact a proportion of the sector and represent a significant amount of sector income as the role of the sector in providing directly commissioned services has increased. It is also true that our approach to commissioning and funding helps to set a tone for our relationship and partnership working with the sector and it therefore needs to be in line with our wider strategy.

It is fair to say that there has been some criticism by the social sector of commissioning arrangements, which are often seen to be an overly process-driven, transactional approach with an emphasis on procurement and contract management and this is recognised. This is not just a criticism in Kent; the burden of greater regulation and resources needed by VCSE organisations

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to meet the requirements of public contracting, is widely debated. It is a real challenge we cannot simply ignore. We know that good engagement and partnership working can help to overcome barriers to procurement; by developing Market Position Statements and early engagement with providers, including the social sector we can help organisations that are engaged in public procurement to align to our future commissioning intentions and plans, where they choose to do so. We must also continue to work with providers, particularly smaller providers to ensure that our commissioning standards and processes are proportionate and are developed with a greater recognition of the diversity of potential providers in the market. This includes setting realistic timescales for bidders and offering support or signposting to resources where appropriate; this could include accessing our business support funding.

There are also opportunities, perhaps highlighted in the last year to look at better ways of proactively collaborating, taking a more flexible and creative approach to our commissioning, including using a mix of funding mechanisms. We must ensure that we build back better and how we do this alongside key partners in the local Kent economy, such as the social sector will be pivotal to our success.

The last year has also highlighted some of the complicated dependencies, which exist between the social sector and public sector. As parts of the sector have increasingly become a significant contracted provider of public services over the last 20 years or more, there have been longstanding debates about the challenges this may have created in certain parts of the sector but also that some funding arrangements have had a destabilising effect. It is also fair to say that there is dependency in certain parts of the public sector on the social sector to meet demand for services and a real risk if those organisations are no longer financially viable.

Ultimately it is for the Board of an organisation to set their risk appetite, to determine their financial strategy and to decide whether to enter contracts. There have been concerns raised about the budget for contracts, which the social sector feels do not appear to support full cost recovery and sets a false expectation that social sector providers can raise other funding to meet the gap. This is not just a Kent issue, although we have significant expenditure with the sector for the delivery of services, but this is an issue which requires us to work in partnership to understand in more detail. We are committed to looking at the risk and issues within the existing commissioning model as part of our work around our future commissioning model and to better understand the challenges. This work will involve both KCC and engagement with sector representatives. This work once undertaken will be reported to the VCS Strategic Partnership Board and VCSE Steering Group.

Social Value

The Public Service (Social Value) Act 2012 required local authorities to 'consider' social value when commissioning services subject to the Public Procurement Regulations 2020. This requirement is linked to a local authority's duty to consider overall best value, as described, and means that certain public body commissioners must consider the following at pre-procurement:

- How the services they are going to buy might improve the social, economic or environmental well-being of the area

- How they might secure this improvement; and

- Whether they should consult on these issues.

The Council has continued to develop its approach to social value and work is ongoing to ensure consistent guidance and standards across the Council. We are committed to maximising the community benefits of every penny we spend and to improving the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of Kent, by not simply considering the price of a service, but what can be achieved with the resources available.

We will consider and act to make sure that social value can be enhanced, and equality can be advanced both:

- through the delivery of a service itself, and

- through additional value that a provider might offer in addition to the core requirements of a contract.

However, we also expect our providers to consider how they can be of benefit to the local community through increasing economic opportunities, improving social wellbeing and minimising environmental damage.

- **Local Employment:** creation of local employment and training opportunities
- **Local Economy:** supporting local SMEs and buying locally where possible
- **Community development:** development of resilient local community and community support organisations, especially in those areas and communities identified as having the greatest need
- **Good Employer:** support for staff development and welfare within the service providers' own organisation and within their supply chain
- **Green and Sustainable**: protecting the environment, minimising waste

In addition, we have now procured a social value platform - *the Social Value Exchange,* which is an online marketplace used by a number of local authorities to maximise social value in contracts. This tool will enable

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commissioners to generate resources into community organisations through our procurement processes, with the opportunity to leverage up to £1bn of the Councils procurement spend to get tailored resources into local community organisations. Work to develop this model within Kent is underway and will include engaging VCSE representatives to help shape how we use this platform in the future.

Grant Framework for funding VCSE organisations:

We know that grants play an important role in supporting organisations within the community in pursuit of their aims, to stimulate the growth of new micro organisations and for developing new and innovative approaches to delivering services.

We created our grant funding framework in 2015 recognising that practice around grants had not always been consistent in the past and grants had sometimes funded historic arrangements that were not seen to be accessible to a wide variety of organisations. Grants had also been used inappropriately in the past for the delivery of services that have then been effectively 'contract managed'. Equally, where grants have been used to support innovation and new projects, there had been little consideration for the longer-term sustainability of existing projects or the infrastructure of organisations themselves, and often with timescales for delivery that are too short.

The grant framework has been welcomed and has been largely successful in providing consistency and transparency in much of our grant funding and improving the way grants are allocated. We have been working hard over the past 6 years in developing our grant framework and have made some adjustments based on feedback to improve practice and we will continue to do so.

We developed our grant framework before the government published its then Grant Standards. These have now been developed into the Government Functional Standard for general grants and the principles we set out in 2015 largely adhere to the principles subsequently set out by the government. However, KCC grant awards are often of lower value than those typical of government and therefore we will continue to take a proportionate approach to applying the general principles. Where significant new grants are undertaken, we will consider on a case-by-case basis if a more rigorous grant business case and process are required.

However, we are also committed to supporting a sustainable funding environment, and to consider a wide range of ways to fund or resource the sector. This strategy aims to recognise the need to support the sector to explore different funding options, however, it will also ensure that our approach to grant funding does not build dependency in the sector and is open and transparent.

In our grant framework we are referring to **General Grants** as defined by the Cabinet Office:

Grants made by departments or their grant-making Arm's Length Bodies to outside bodies to reimburse expenditure on agreed specific items or functions, and often paid only on statutory conditions. These are the grants, which are most closely related in administration to contract procurement, whilst remaining legally distinct.

The grant framework also endorses the principle set out in Managing Public money that:

Grants should not be confused with contracts. A public sector organisation funds by grant as a matter of policy, not in return for services provided under contract[22].

More details on our grant framework and the criteria it sets out are found in Annex 2.

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22 Edited from Managing Public Money (HM Treasury 2013 with annexes revised 2019) Annex 5.1

Reviewing and Delivering this Strategy

We will use the framework set out earlier in this strategy to measure success and progress; we will report on this annually. This will be shared with Cabinet, P&R Cabinet Committee, the Strategic Partnership Board (VCS) and the VCS Steering Group.

We will commit to a full review of the strategy by the end of 2024.

Annex 1:
National Data on registered charities

The National Council for Voluntary Organisation's (NCVO) Almanac 2020 reports that the income of the sector grew by 2% to £53.5bn in 2017-18[23]. Income had also grown for the preceding 3 years. The growth in total income was largely due to increasing income from the public; income from Government also grew after three years of slightly falling income.

Charity size	Income banding (based on NCVO bandings)
Micro	Less than £10,000
Small	£10,000 - £100,000
Medium	£100,000 - £1m
Large	£1m - £10m
Major	More than £10m
Super-Major	More than £100m

In 2017/18, income decreased for micro, small and medium sized organisations nationally but grew for bigger organisations. More than half (£29bn) of the sector's income was generated by major and super-major voluntary organisations – those with an income over £10m. Their share of the sector's income has almost continuously grown from 38% in 2000/01 to 54% in 2017/18. Much of the increase was concentrated in super-major voluntary organisations with an income of over £100m. In 2017/18, the number of super-major voluntary organisations continued to grow from 51 to 56, accounting for 23% of the sector's total income alone. The growth in the income of super-major organisations can be explained by their increased number but also their strategies and decision-making. They include organisations that used to be former government institutions, organisations that have grown through mergers and those that centralised funds where previously they were held internationally. The public continues to be the largest income source for the sector, accounting for almost half of the total income, followed by government.

The sector also makes a considerable contribution to the UK economy. According to the estimation method developed by NCVO and ONS, the voluntary sector contributed £18.2bn to the UK economy in 2017/18, representing 0.9% of total GDP. About 910,000 people worked in the voluntary sector in the UK in June 2019, equivalent to 2.8% of the UK workforce. 23 UK Civil Society Almanac 2020 | Home | NCVO.

23 Sector finances - Financials | UK Civil Society Almanac 2021 | NCVO

Furthermore, an estimated 11.9 million people formally volunteered at least once a month in 2017/18. The most recent figures from ONS for 2016 estimated the value of voluntary activity in the UK to be £23.9bn.

Annex 2:
Grant Framework

Under the Local Authorities Data Transparency code, KCC has a duty to publish all grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector on our website through a grants *register*.

When awarding grants, it is the responsibility of the grant owner (KCC officer) to make sure they comply with these processes, which will enable us to monitor the impact of our funding, ensure transparency and identify the type of grants being awarded across the authority.

What is a grant?

Grants should not be confused with contracts. A public sector organisation funds by grant as a matter of policy, not in return for services provided under contract. Edited from Managing Public Money *(HM Treasury 2013)*

KCC VCS grant standards:

- All VCS grants must be subject to an open application process, if not there must be a record of the decision for a direct award

- All VCS grants must adhere to the standardised definitions set out in KCC's VCS policy

- All VCS grants must be subject to a grant agreement

- All grants must be linked to and clearly deliver against KCC outcomes

- All grants must be subject to proportionate evaluation /monitoring framework set out in the grant agreement

- All grants must have a clearly defined grant owner and accountable officer

KCC grant definitions:

Innovation Grants (one off):

- payment for innovations/pilots

- payment to help develop new organisations which will contribute to the Council's Strategic framework and priorities.

Strategic Grants:

- Payments to organisations of strategic importance given under the Local authority's wellbeing power(as provided in the Localism Act 2011) to help the authority to achieve its strategic and supporting outcomes

Grants may be made as direct awards and not through a competitive process but must meet the defined criteria (set out below).

Both Strategic and Innovation grants will be awarded over the three year MTFP period and where possible and appropriate will be awarded on a multi-year basis with payments made annually. KCC reserves the right to refuse multi-year agreements where necessary.

Direct awards:

We recognise that in some cases it may be appropriate for grants to be paid as direct awards and not through a competitive process. In these cases, the grant must meet at least one of the following criteria:

a) payments made to an organisation which inhabits a unique position or offers a particularly specialist function;

b) payments made to an organisation which has a track record of excellence in a particular area;

c) or in the event of market failure.

Where direct awards are made, we require these to be recorded internally.

Applying for grants:

All grant opportunities to the VCS, except the direct awards, will be advertised on the *Community Grants Funding page on Kent.gov.uk* in agreement with our Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance team.

Combined Member Grants:

These will continue to be advertised via the current application process set out on the *Community Grants Funding page* and managed by the Member Support Team.

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Kent County Council

Civil Society

Strategy for Kent 2021-2024

Supporting connected communities
and a sustainable social sector in Kent

Kent
County
Council
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Kent County Council

Civil Society

Strategy for Kent 2021-2024

Supporting connected communities
and a sustainable social sector in Kent

Executive Summary

Definitions and Terminology

What do we mean by civil society?

By civil society, we mean all those individuals, informal and formal groups and organisations that operate outside of state control and for the primary purpose of social good. Whilst we recognise that private business can be socially motivated, this strategy focuses on those organisations that do not distribute profits and are not part of the statutory sector.

Whilst the VCSE or 'social sector' as we refer to it, is at the heart of a strong civil society we believe the terminology of civil society is important in establishing that social good happens outside of the state and in many different forms. This is not always through the traditional organisational structures, such as registered charities that we have referred to as the social sector. It also includes the more informal and often un-constituted community groups and individuals taking an active role in their local community, to improve their local area or champion a particular cause with a primary aim of delivering social good.

Social sector

We have used the term 'social sector' in this strategy, where referring to the 'sector' as opposed to organisations

We also wanted to broaden out the definition of 'voluntary sector' to recognise the important contribution that social enterprises make to our local communities. Whilst fundamentally different from charities they share the objective to complete a social mission.

Introduction

This strategy recognises the role of civil society in Kent and sets out how Kent County Council (KCC) will work to support a strong and vibrant civil society across our communities. This strategy replaces our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) policy agreed in 2015 and is the first Civil Society Strategy for KCC.

We originally developed and consulted on this strategy in early 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. We subsequently decided to pause the development due to Covid and allow time to reflect on the challenges and impact of the last year. However, we believe that the importance of this strategy has only grown in the last year. Not only because of the incredible response we have seen from our communities, voluntary organisations, and local people but because of the undeniable impact the pandemic has and will continue to have on us as individuals, communities and as organisations and the need to recognise and respond to that.

Prior to this we had seen the publication of the first Government Civil Society Strategy. The national strategy shift informed our decision to broaden out the VCS policy into a new Civil Society Strategy, however, 'Civil Society' also allowed us to recognise the contribution of both the registered charities and voluntary organisations but also the many informal groups and individual volunteers who play an important role in our communities. This also reflected the conversations we had with the sector since the publication of the VCS policy.

This direction still feels right; we have seen evidence of the resilience and innovation that exists both within the social sector and when our communities or 'civil society' come together. This strategy we hope celebrates that civic activity and community spirit and sets out our ambitions for the County Council's relationship with Civil Society in Kent.

Finally, but importantly this strategy sets out how we will support the social sector, not only through our funding practice such as our approach to grant funding but also through our funding of infrastructure support to the sector. .

The KCC Civil Society strategy is an important document for the authority, reflecting the crucial role the social sector plays in achieving strong and resilient communities across our county. It is also a key strategy in delivering against the outcomes of the Council's *Interim Strategic plan.*

Aims and objectives of this strategy:

① a recognition of the contribution of civil society in Kent and the VCSE (the 'social sector') as a core part of that

② a commitment to supporting civil society to flourish

③ a commitment to a strategic relationship with the social sector that recognises its diversity and goes beyond those that have a financial relationship with the Council

④ a commitment to build on the partnership working we have seen over the last year between both public sector partners and the social sector, which recognises the sector as an equal partner

⑤ a commitment to support the social sector to be sustainable

⑥ a commitment to safeguarding the independence of VCSE organisations.

How will this strategy be used?

• to shape our relationship with civil society in the future and the social sector as a core part of that

• to provide a framework to guide the approach to the Council's engagement with the social sector

• to provide consistency in our approach to grant funding to the social sector

• to shape our commitment to an offer of support to the social sector, and the principles which underpin it including fair funding.

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How will we measure our progress and success?

We will have succeeded when:

GOAL 1
The role of Civil society in Kent is well understood and valued

PRIORITIES
○ We advocate for and champion the social sector alongside partners.

○ We use data to understand the diversity and scale of the social sector in Kent.

○ We understand the sector's contribution to the local economy and in supporting communities.

○ We recognise the role of civil society in building community resilience within our strategies and plans.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through our dataset on the charity sector, which is annually reported on Kent.gov to look at the size, scale and financial health of sector.

Through our work with partners and other funders sharing intelligence and insights on the sector - using the Strategic Partnership Board as a vehicle to do this.

Through promotion of this strategy across the Council to provide a framework to inform future strategies and plans, where appropriate.

GOAL 2
The Social Sector in Kent is sustainable and innovative

PRIORITIES
○ The sector has access to a range of funding streams that support innovation not dependency and instability.

○ There is access to a good support model that helps organisations to diversify, adapt, and grow.

○ The infrastructure support available is responsive to the needs of the diverse organisations that exist.

○ We have good partnership working, which encourages innovation and collaboration to support individuals and our communities.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through the evaluation of our infrastructure support initiatives e.g., volunteering, Crowdfunding and feedback on the Strategic Recovery Fund.

Gathering feedback from the sector on our funded model of support as it develops longer term *(set out in section 3)*.

Through the work programme of the Strategic Partnership Board and VCSE Steering Group.

GOAL 3
The Social Sector's independence is upheld, and it has a strong voice to influence

PRIORITIES
○ We have the right engagement channels in place, which create a space for healthy challenge and discussion.

○ We recognise the diversity of the social sector through our engagement.

○ Our engagement is meaningful and not transactional.

○ We have a two-way flow of information, which enables informed engagement and better partnership working.

WAYS WE WILL MONITOR THIS
Through working with the VCSE Steering Group and developing our engagement model based on sector feedback, ensuring it is diverse.

Through our future networking and engagement – allowing a space for engagement and healthy challenge

By working with partners such as NHS and district councils to ensure we create effective local and strategic engagement mechanisms.

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People

Whilst civil society is independent of the state a proportion of the social sector is an important provider of publicly funded services to individuals on our behalf. However, the role of civil society in supporting people is broader than that; it often provides that wider safety net, supporting people in our communities outside of state support

During our consultation people described civil society as 'people coming together to support each other, ensuring our communities are inclusive'. It is through the social action of individuals within our communities that social connections are often created that are vital to improving our wellbeing.

This strategy does therefore recognise the sector's role in delivering public services, something which has grown in the last 20 years, but it does not solely focus on this. Whether delivering public services or providing more informal support, we know that over the last 18 months this support has been vital for many people that have been particularly impacted by Covid and will continue to feel the longer term impacts more than most. This includes people with learning disabilities, care home residents, informal carers, those in low paid employment, vulnerable children, people in the justice system, people with mental health conditions, people living in poverty and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups.

Community groups and VCSE organisations have been a lifeline to many over the last year and will need to continue to support communities to build back, whilst many charities will offer the more formal services to people dealing with the longer-term impact on their lives.

Integral to a thriving civil society are also the countless individuals who volunteer, whether this is by setting up and running activities that bring people together, championing the needs of their local community or serving as trustees. The volunteer effort during the pandemic has been monumental, whilst many volunteers had to shield, new volunteers stepped up and the volunteer infrastructure played a central role in supporting those shielding in Kent as well as in the vaccination effort, which continues. However, the role of volunteers is not something we should only celebrate during a crisis; volunteers are the backbone of the many community organisations that exist day to day. We want to ensure that people are empowered to take part in their communities going forward in the same way they have over the last year.

What KCC will do

This strategy sets out our commitment to support the social sector and civil society to ensure that it can continue in the many ways it supports people in our community; our support offer sets this out in Chapter 3. However, this strategy also sets out the relationship we want to establish with civil society in Kent; one that recognises the diversity of the sector and empowers individuals to be active in their local area and to continue the civic contribution we have seen during the pandemic.

Places

Civil society enhances the places we live in. It provides opportunities for diverse communities to meet, it celebrates the history and heritage of our local areas, creates social networks through shared spaces and activities that people value. A sense of place and identity is important to people. People want their local area to be thriving and the physical spaces and community assets are an important part of this and often cared for or run by local organisations and volunteers

However, the social sector also makes a significant contribution to the local economy, creating vibrant and diverse places whilst reinvesting back into their communities. Registered charities and social enterprises are a significant employer in Kent, whilst the significant contribution of 19,000 volunteers (across major, large and medium sized organisations) and the financial value of this should not be overlooked.

Civil society has the ability to connect people across our communities, it is this informal infrastructure that sprang into action at the start of the pandemic and was able to swiftly respond. We have seen that building resilience is very often best achieved at the local level and civil society plays an important role in tackling important issues such as social isolation and loneliness. What makes communities resilient is as diverse and complex as the communities themselves; whilst the state plays a role in this it is also the myriad of local organisations, community networks and trusted engagement channels, the community leaders, and local volunteers.

We also know that very often the most effective and responsive support for young people is embedded in their local communities; through both uniformed youth services such as the Scouts, to open access youth services and more informal community organisations, all supporting young people into positive activities. We know that the best outcomes for all will be achieved by empowering and working alongside our communities and those who are active in supporting the young people within them.

What KCC will do

We will ensure the voice of the social sector is heard within the local economy as a significant contributor. When we talk about growth in Kent this must be inclusive and hearing the voice of the social sector will help us to achieve

this, many of the people these organisations represent are amongst the most disadvantaged in our communities.

This strategy seeks to highlight and celebrate the variety of community assets and resources that exist within Kent, but it also sets out a commitment to support them. This includes through our support offer to the social sector set out in Chapter 3 but also working across the County Council in a way that recognises and seeks to support our communities to be resilient. This means working in partnership and collaborating both internally and externally with partners and civil society itself to best meet the needs of our communities and to ensure that individuals can be empowered to play an active role in their local area.

Chapter 3

Supporting the Social Sector

This strategy is not just a document, it is our future commitment to supporting the social sector as a core part of civil society. In this chapter, we set out the range of ways we will do this, including through our investment in infrastructure support with an agreed budget over the 3-year life of the strategy. Whilst not a statutory requirement, this is a political priority for the County Council and there is budget commitment for 'infrastructure support' over the life of this strategy.

Objectives of KCC support for the social sector:

- **Establishing a strategic relationship with the social sector- so that it can effectively engage and influence.**

- **Enabling a sustainable, diverse, and independent social sector in Kent, which can grow and develop.**

- **Enabling a coordinated, properly resourced, and sustainable volunteering system across the county.**

- **Creating the right conditions for small community organisations to respond to communities' needs and for communities to be empowered.**

Why this is important

We know that there are many strengths in the sector and not all organisations will require support. That is why our funding will be a contribution to infrastructure support; to support organisations where additional support is **needed** against the objectives we have set out. Our support is not intended to create dependency or to be paternalistic but to play a role in supporting a sustainable and independent social sector and vibrant civil society in Kent.

Kent has a diverse and large social sector spanning across 12 districts, made up of micro and small local organisations and larger organisations that may cover multiple geographical areas. There is not one single organisation that can advocate for or support such a diverse sector; however, we are committed to developing the right model of support that works for the needs of Kent

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organisations. This will involve working with organisations that currently provide that support in a way that is sustainable and creating new ways of supporting the sector, where gaps in support are identified.

What KCC will do

For 2021/22 we have allocated funding to respond to immediate needs post Covid, informed by engagement with the sector and the Action Plan developed by the VCS Recovery Cell. However, we will use the learning from these interim arrangements to help us shape the ongoing support offer and the funding mechanisms we use to deliver it be that contract, grants or a hybrid of arrangements. Thereafter the committed budget to support this strategy will be used to deliver against the objectives set out over the life of the strategy.

Our infrastructure support offer

Establishing a strategic relationship with the social sector - so that it can effectively engage and influence

What KCC will do

- Work with the established VCS Strategic Partnership Board to deliver an effective engagement channel on key strategic issues where the VCS and Civil Society have a clear role, based on the principles of mature and open dialogue

- Work with the Board to advocate for and better understand the challenges of the social sector in Kent alongside partners

- Evolve the VCSE Steering Group to ensure it is an effective, representative body for the sector including for small, local organisations and enables effective communication between KCC and the social sector on strategic issues.

- Look at ways in which we can embed wider engagement and collaboration with Civil Society as we evolve the Steering Group model, including working with other partners such as NHS and District Councils to support and tap into local forums.

Enabling a sustainable, diverse, and independent social sector in Kent, which can grow and develop

What KCC will do

- **Make a contribution to funding business support for organisations that need it, this will include access to support on:**

  - Governance and organisational structures (including for new organisations)

  - Digital skills

  - Leadership training

  - Funding strategies, accessing different income streams and financial controls

  - Organisational/business plans and strategies

The best mechanism to deliver this will be informed by our evaluation and impact reporting on the Strategic Recovery Fund, which we have established for 2021/22 and our ongoing engagement with the sector and VCSE Steering Group.

Enabling a coordinated, properly resourced, and sustainable volunteering system across the county

What KCC will do

- **Invest in a Volunteering Infrastructure pilot for 2021-21, led by Ashford Volunteer Centre this will:**

  - Deliver support in the recruitment and retention of volunteers and access to good advice and guidance on volunteering across the County

  - Develop a sustainable model of volunteering infrastructure, that ensures a consistent level of support across the county and leverages funding from a range of sources

  - Evaluate the pilot to inform future funding for volunteering infrastructure.

Creating the right conditions for small community organisations to respond to communities' needs and for communities to be empowered.

What KCC will do

- Provide a contribution for organisations to access business support as outlined to enable organisations to grow and diversify

- Deliver the CrowdfundKent pilot (set to run until the end of 2022), which is aimed at supporting local organisations and projects that are backed by the local community

- Evaluate the impact of this pilot to inform our future support to community organisations and projects to ensure that our communities are empowered.

Fair Funding as an enabler to a sustainable social sector

Why is this important

Our infrastructure offer is one way of supporting the sector, but our own funding practices must equally support not destabilise the sector. If these are right, then it will enable continued diversity in those that deliver services funded by the Council but also help to ensure our grants and contracts are accessible to a wide range of organisations, without creating dependency and threatening the independence of some organisations

Whilst this strategy is not a commissioning document nor is it focused solely on the relationship with providers of services funded by the Council, the significance of KCC's spend with VCSE organisations means it is an integral part of our relationship. How we fund and the process and decisions we make as a Council ultimately do impact a proportion of the sector and represent a significant amount of sector income as the role of the sector in providing directly commissioned services has increased. It is also true that our approach to commissioning and funding helps to set a tone for our relationship and partnership working with the sector and it therefore needs to be in line with our wider strategy.

What will KCC do

- Adhere to the principles of Best Value Duty

- Continue to embed our grant framework and ensure that grants are accessible, transparent and not creating dependency

- Look at how the commissioning model should develop in the future to ensure that commissioning has a greater emphasis on locality, collaboration and encourages diversity. This includes looking at support, timely engagement and proportionate processes to enable greater access to public procurement

- Commit to undertaking work to better understand the risk and issues within the existing commissioning model. This work will involve both KCC and engagement with sector representatives. This work once undertaken will be reported to the VCS Strategic Partnership Board and VCSE Steering Group.

Reviewing this strategy

We will use the framework set out earlier in this strategy to measure success and progress; we will report on this annually. This will be shared with Cabinet, P&R Cabinet Committee, the Strategic Partnership Board (VCS) and the VCSE Steering Group.

We will commit to a full review of the strategy by the end of 2024.

Kent County Council

Civil Society

Strategy for Kent 2021-2024

Supporting connected communities
and a sustainable social sector in Kent

Executive Summary

Kent
County
Council
kent.gov.uk

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Civil Society Strategy Consultation Report

Introduction

In 2019, Kent County Council made a commitment to adopt a new Civil Society Strategy (CSS), this was presented to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee in November 2019. The first iteration of the strategy was open for formal consultation in February 2020, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic, further activity on the document was paused. In 2021 the existing draft was revised, using the analysis and feedback from the previous consultation and this was published for consultation in September 2021.

The Civil Society Strategy will replace the Kent Partners Compact, which was last revised in 2012 and sets out KCC's future relationship with the Civil Society and the "social sector", voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) as a core part of that.

For the purposes of the strategy, the term "Civil Society" relates to *"all those individual, informal, and formal groups and organisations that operate outside of state control and for the primary purpose of social good."*

The Strategy sets out the objectives and intentions for KCC's future offer of infrastructure support to the VCSE, the funding agreed for this is £2.1M over the 3 years of the strategy and will be allocated against the priorities and framework set out in the strategy.

Additionally, the strategy will revise KCC's current grant framework which was developed in 2015 and has been updated based on feedback from the past 6 years of operation. This is intended to create consistency and clarity in the way we award grants to the VCSE across the Council.

This will be a supporting strategy to the Interim Strategic Plan and longer term, to the new Strategic Statement for the Council.

Consultation Process

A 9-week formal consultation was undertaken during the development of the draft strategy in 2020 alongside early engagement, which took place through VCSE networks and representative bodies.

A VCS Recovery Cell was established during the pandemic as part of the Kent Resilience Forum architecture; the impact assessment and action plan developed by that group of VCS representatives (facilitated by KCC and Medway officers) was used to revise the strategy.

We undertook a shorter period of formal consultation of 4 weeks to revise the draft strategy and this took place from the 6th of September - 3rd October 2021. For both consultations we undertook an Equality Impact Assessment and alternative formats were made available to ensure a wide variety of responses.

We have kept the VCS Strategic Partnership Board updated on all stages of the creation of the strategy and circulated the consultation link to our key contacts within KCC and partner organisations (NHS, District Councils and VCS organisations) once it was live.

The Strategy has been discussed at a number of internal KCC meetings including Management Team Meetings for relevant directorates and it has been shared more widely through engagement forums

such as the Joint Kent Chief's meeting (District Council representatives). We have worked alongside the new VCSE Steering Group made up of representatives from across the VCSE, to inform the development of the revised draft in addition to formal consultation.

The consultation has also been widely distributed across KCC's social media channels, where we received 7555 impressions on Twitter over the course of the social media campaign with 49 clicks through to the consultation link.

Previously a high-level outline of the strategy structure was taken to Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 8th November 2019. A report outlining our intention to revise the draft went to Cabinet on 24th June.

Respondents

Over the course of the two formal consultations a total of 78 individuals across a number of different areas of the sector have responded This does not include th**e** engagement undertaken with the VCSE Steering Group.

The below graph shows the distribution for the responses received in relation to their role/organisational capacity. As the graph shows, the majority of responses (69%) were either responding on behalf of a VCSE organisation or were a trustee/volunteer.
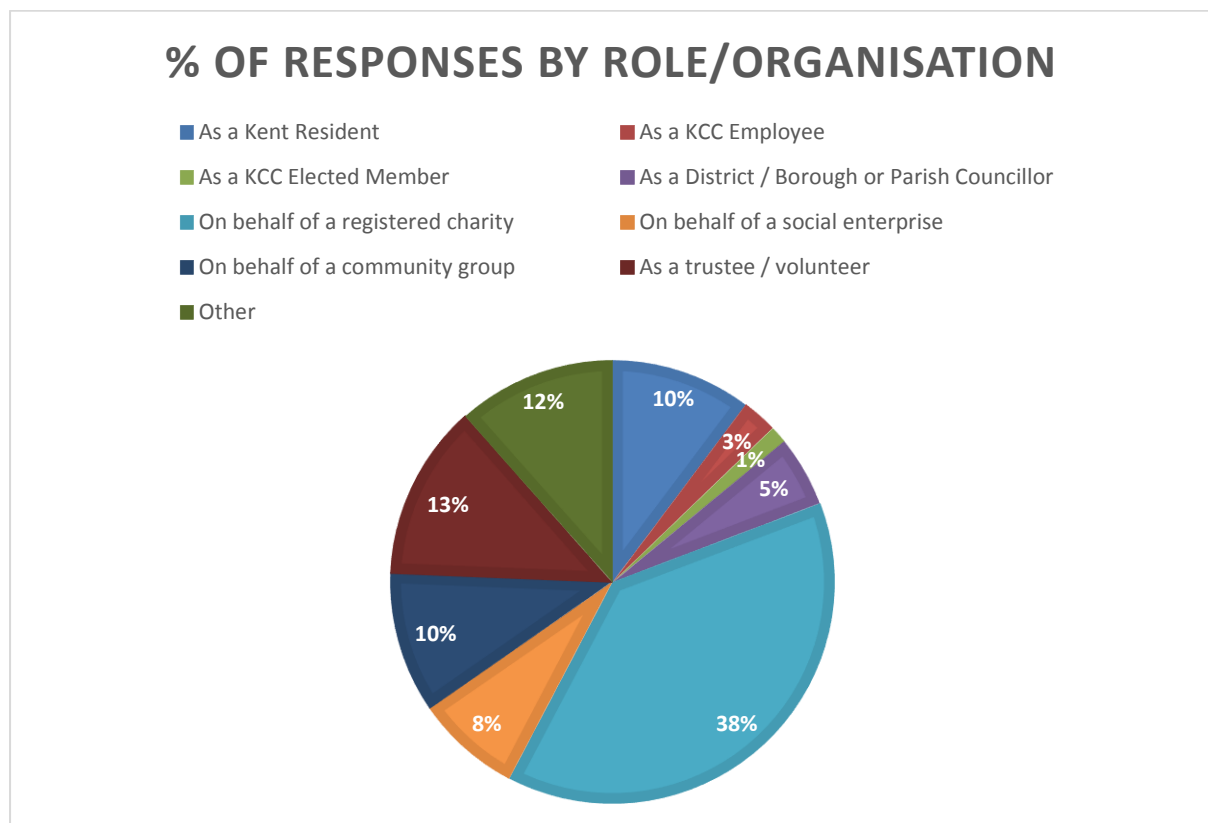
Equality Analysis

Responses to the consultation did not raise any concerns relating to protected characteristics.

How your views helped shape KCC's Civil Society Strategy - "You Said, We Did"

We asked for views on the strategy, in particular the future support needs of the sector and whether the strategy captures the challenges facing the sector following the Covid-19 pandemic.
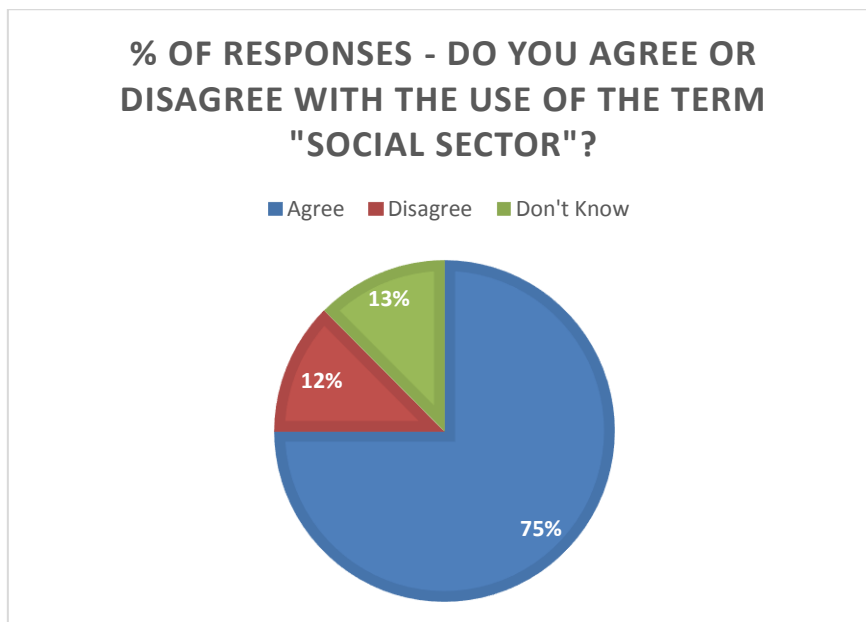
Your feedback has been used to change the strategy and in particular, the tables below highlight our response to key data we received during the consultation process.

Terminology

In round 1 of the consultation, 75% respondents agreed with the title of the strategy, and this was consequently carried forward to the revised draft of the document.
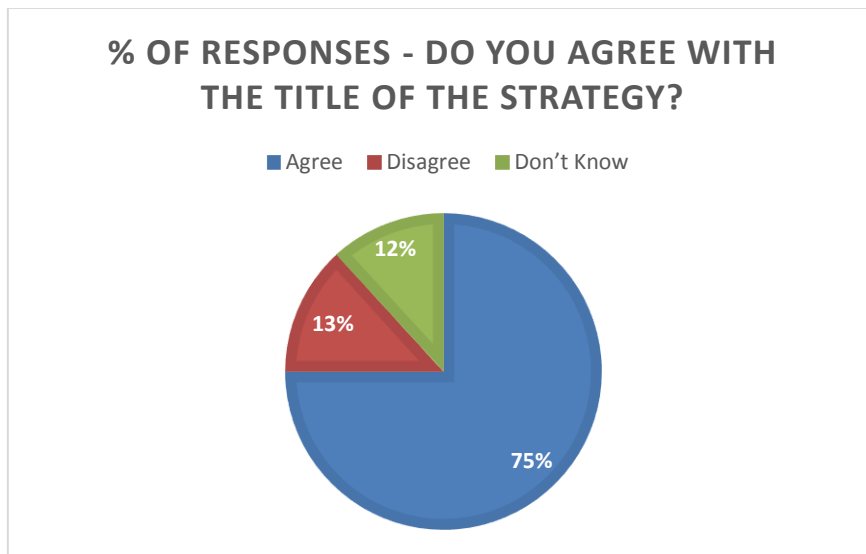
In both rounds of the consultation, respondents were asked their view on whether they *"agreed or disagreed with our use of the term social sector"*, the majority agreed with this change in shared terminology.

You Said	We Did
It was felt the term "voluntary" sector can undervalue the economic contribution the sector makes to the local economy and can give the impression the sector can exist on little or minimal funding.	We have used the terminology 'social sector' in the strategy based on discussions with the sector particularly over the last year.
You felt it was difficult to define what is meant by a "Civil Society" and that the "social sector" is not a term everyone is familiar with.	This use of terminology was supported by the consultation responses, with the majority of respondents across both consultations supporting the move to a 'civil society' strategy however we added a section on terminology to ensure our message was clear.
You felt the strategy lacked detail on how it will be implemented and the amount of funding available alongside targets and timescales.	We have outlined in the strategy the measures of success, which will be used to monitor our progress against the strategy frameworks. A 3-year budget is agreed as set out in the strategy and will be used to deliver the support offer set out in Chapter 3. The accompanying Executive Summary provides a concise summary of what KCC will do to implement the strategy.

Challenges and opportunities facing the sector post Covid.

The majority of respondents agreed that the strategy captures the opportunities available to the sector post Covid; the strategy recognises the considerable impact the sector has had during the pandemic since it began in 2020; with the increasing role of volunteers in supporting our communities.

You Said	We Did
Some respondents felt that opportunities to work more collaboratively could be further emphasised.	Building on our work with the VCSE Steering Group and through our support offer we will be addressing wider engagement with the sector and the strategy now recognises more explicitly the need to work with partners such as district councils and the NHS, as we look at how we can facilitate engagement and collaboration at the local level.
You said there should be more encouragement to the sector to work in collaboration with KCC to come up with innovative solutions to social issues	We have set out in the strategy our commitment to working more collaboratively with the sector through our engagement and in our commissioning approach.

Support to the Sector

In round 1 of the consultation, 88% of respondents agreed that *"access to the right business support is important to the social sector to help organisations to grow, be sustainable and diversify".*

DO YOU AGREE THAT ACCESS TO THE RIGHT BUSINESS SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT TO THE SOCIAL SECTOR TO HELP ORGANISATIONS TO GROW, BE SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFY?

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't' Know

10%
2%
88%
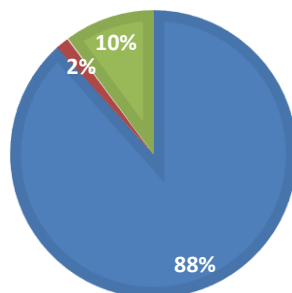
We developed this further for round 2 of the consultation and respondents were asked to rank several *"business support options in order of their importance for Voluntary Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations"*. The majority felt that financial advice, including how to access different funding, income generation and financial planning was the most important area of focus for the sector with Board development/training to support organisational strategy being of the least importance.

You Said	We Did
You said access to grants for small organisations in order to support their core mission was the most important area in which KCC could support VCSE organisations over the next 5 years.	Since the consultation in 2019 we have developed and delivered our Crowdfund Kent pilot, supporting local projects and community organisations. This will be evaluated and the findings from this used to inform future support to community organisations and activities.
Financial advice was felt to be the most important area for business support but accessing this was impacted by lack of funding	Through the introduction of the Strategic Recovery Fund, organisations will be able to access funding to help develop their business support needs. This will be reviewed and developed following the pilot round so KCC can identify what additional support will be needed for future years
You said that Time and access to funding to gain business support was highlighted as key areas of importance for the sector that prohibits them from accessing the support they need	We have developed the Strategic Recovery Fund for 21-22 to enable organisations to access grants to buy in support and expertise, recognising that funding and time is a barrier for some.

Volunteering

We asked whether respondents have *"in the past accessed support to recruit volunteers or for volunteer brokerage (matching people into volunteering opportunities)?"*, the majority replied that they had not however they did have concerns about recruiting and retaining volunteers in the future

and that they would welcome additional advice and support on this issue. This area was welcomed by the responses

In response we will be launching the Volunteering Support Pilot alongside colleagues from the sector to help create a better resourced and more co-ordinated volunteering network across the County; this was also highlighted in the VCS Recovery Cell action plan which was developed in response to Covid.

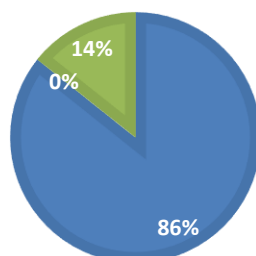| You Said	We Did
You said that access to support for volunteers was the most important outcome of promoting and supporting civil activity within the community.	We are creating a pilot to support the sector in creating a sustainable model of volunteering to develop multiple funding streams or creating revenue. Good quality advice and support will be available through the pilot for organisations to access training and guidance on recruiting and retaining volunteers.
It was felt that the Strategy's emphasis on volunteering was welcome as volunteers are essential to many VCSE organisations.	We recognised the importance of volunteers and have revised the strategy; accordingly, we will be building on this with the introduction of the volunteering pilot.

Engagement

In our initial consultation, the majority (93%) of respondents agreed that a more open dialogue, beyond that of commissioning and funding, was needed by the sector. Since then, we have developed the VCSE Steering Group as the beginning of establishing a more coordinated and engaged relationship with the sector.
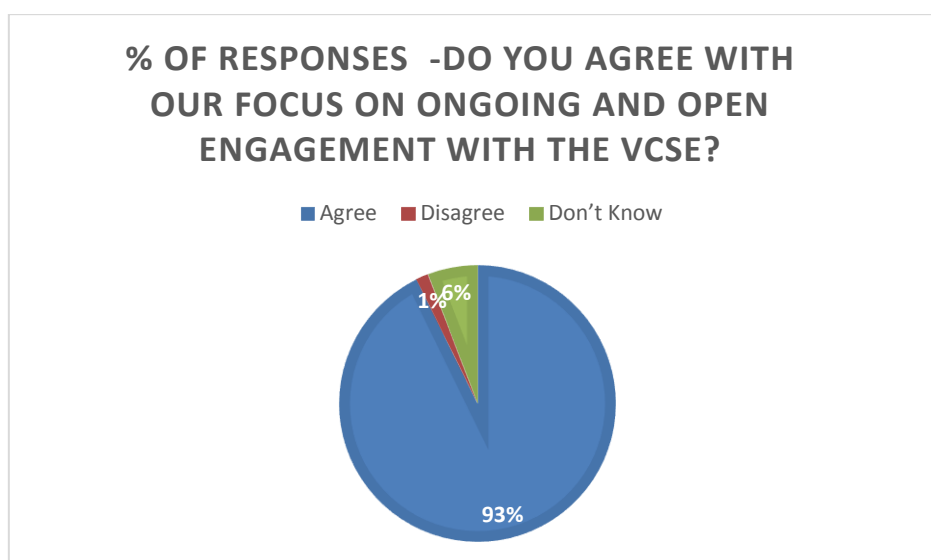
Following on from the second consultation, the majority (86%) of respondents felt that the changes we had made were a positive step in the right direction however more engagement mechanisms were required and to ensure that the sector are aware of the Steering Group and that it is accessible to more of the sector.

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR?

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't Know

You Said	We Did
You said that KCC creating an open and ongoing dialogue with the social sector was important to you, rather than engaging solely through commissioning.	We have created the Strategic Partnership Board, with member representation from the District Councils, Voluntary Sector and NHS. The VCS rep on the Board chairs the VCSE Steering Group, which is made up of individuals from several organisations who can share key issues and discussions with a representative from KCC in attendance.
You agreed that the VCSE Steering Group should have a more formalised membership however raised concerns about whether a rotational membership would be appropriate.	As part of our offer of support we will look to evolve the Steering Group and its role alongside the Chair in order to ensure that we have the right representation to provide an effective engagement channel. This is an important forum for KCC and indeed partners, wanting to meaningfully engage with the sector and we recognise that whilst a starting point, the model can be improved. The challenges of a rotational membership are recognised and will be addressed as we develop the future model.
You said that each district should have local forums to enable the local VCSE organisations to respond to what is happening at a local level.	We are working with District Colleagues to ensure that we can regularly share information about the social sector and the support we have collectively put in place. This will include how we can work with the established local engagement forums to improve collaboration and ensure we can engage with local organisations.
You said that regular communication and consultation with the sector as a whole was important. You also felt that monitoring of our success could be fixed on existing networks which may disregard other areas of the sector.	We will be reviewing the VCSE Steering Group to ensure the membership is more reflective of the sector in Kent. the membership of the VCS Strategic Partnership Board cuts across public sector partners and the VCSE and we will be using insight and intelligence gathered from different channels via that Board to inform our success

	monitoring. This will include surveys of the sector undertaken by sector representatives, where available. We will also use feedback from the Strategic Recovery Fund and the evaluation of the Volunteering infrastructure pilot, to build our understanding and insight.
You asked for a key designated person within the council with the power to make and implement change.	We have a Key Officer and team designated to delivery on this Strategy with a KCC Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services who holds responsibility for this activity.

Conclusions and Next Steps

A final draft of the strategy informed by the consultation is due to go back to the KCC Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee in November before being formally adopted by Cabinet in December. The final strategy and the consultation report will be available on Kent.gov, once agreed.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:	DECISION NO:
Cabinet	**21/00055**

For publication

Key decision: Yes

Subject Matter / Title of Decision
To adopt the Civil Society Strategy and agree to fund the infrastructure offer set out in the strategy framework. This is an annual budget contribution of £700K over the 3 years of the strategy 2021-2024.

Decision:

As Cabinet we agree to adopt the Civil Society Strategy and commit to funding an infrastructure offer against the strategy framework over the life of the strategy 2021-2024. The relevant Cabinet Member will take the decision on expenditure in line with delegations.

Reason(s) for decision:

The Civil Society strategy will replace KCC's existing VCS policy and set out the future relationship with civil society and the 'social sector', voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE), as a core part of that.

The strategy was previously consulted on between February and April 2020, however due to Covid the development of the strategy was paused. We have now revised the draft to reflect the events of the last year and ensure that it will still meet the challenges going forward.

The strategy sets out the objectives and intentions for KCC's future offer of infrastructure support to the VCSE. The funding agreed for this is £2.1m over the 3 years of the strategy; and will be allocated against the objectives and framework set out in Chapter 3 of the strategy. These are formulated around 4 themes, engagement, business support, volunteering and support to community-based projects and organisations.

The strategy also revises and reinforces the grant framework for the council, which was developed in 2015 and has been updated based on feedback from the past 6 years of operation. This is intended to create consistency and clarity in the way we award grants to the VCSE across the Council.

The strategy replaces the Kent Partners Compact, which was last revised in 2012 and sets out the principles of how we will engage and work with the VCSE in the future.

This is a supporting strategy to the Interim Strategic Plan and longer term, to the new Strategic Statement for the Council.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

Proposed to P&R Cabinet Committee 9th November

Any alternatives considered and rejected:
N/A

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

....
signed   Date

From: **Roger Gough, Leader of the Council**
                Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance

To: **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee,**
                9th November 2021

Subject: **Digital Inclusion and Capability Strategy**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This report seeks endorsement and/or comments on the concept of a new **Kent Digital Inclusion & Capability Strategy**. It outlines the rationale for a new strategy and a proposed outlined work plan to deliver a draft by March 2022 and invites Members to provide initial considerations to inform the scope.

Recommendation(s):

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the development of a corporate strategy for digital inclusion and capability that is:
     led by KCC's Digital Lead (Digital Inclusion & Capability)
     • corporately owned by Strategic & Corporate Services as outlined in Section 2 of this report.
     • designed based on the principles as outlined in Section 3 of this report.

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1. Introduction

1.1   In February 2021, the Leader of the Council took the key decision (21/00024); allocating £2.5m to tackle digital poverty out of the £10m allocation from the available COVID-19 Emergency Grant Funding creating the Helping Hands Support Scheme.

1.2   National research has shown that a significant proportion of the population is digitally excluded because they don't have the digital devices to use online services, access to the internet to use online services or the digital skills to access online services. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the population abandon digital content or services, because it is not accessible.

1.3   Building on the significant activity already undertaken by the Council in this area, and working with partner organisations, including schools and colleges, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, the decision to allocate £2.5m was taken to tackle digital poverty.

1.4   In June 2021, the Contain Outbreak Management Fund allocated a further £2.5m to address digital poverty.

1.5 In July 2021, the Strategic Reset Programme (SRP) Board supported the direction of travel for the digital inclusion and capability workstream (which is part of the Financial Hardship Programme / Helping Hands Scheme) and in September 2021 agreed to align this workstream with SRP's work on Resident and User Experience.

1.6 Further local research has shown that digital exclusion has a negative impact locally in Kent, socially and economically, and the digital divide has grown which has been starkly highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7 The majority of COVID-19 restrictions have now been eased and most 'normal' activity has resumed. While the consequences of the pandemic will continue to impact and need to be responded to for some time, there is a need to consider the longer-term priorities and actions in levelling-up and tackling the digital divide across the county.

1.8 There are many reasons for progressing a new strategy focussed on digital inclusion and capability, some of which are:

- There are changes in public service delivery. Notably the digital transformation and innovation within the sector, not only for the County Council but also for district and borough councils, parish and town councils and partner organisations, such as the NHS, DWP and police. A key benefit of service transformation and innovation for not only public sector organisations, but also taxpayers, are the efficiency and financial savings that can be realised. A clear strategy ought to provide a platform from which Kent can maximise the benefit realisation through digitally inclusive delivery and development.

- There are changes in the economic landscape, including the way in which the workforce will be economically active and engaged and the way in which economic productivity will change as a result of the post-pandemic digital era. Notwithstanding the importance of digital inclusion for the economy to recover sustainably, with a shift in more digital payment methods. A clear strategy ought to provide the opportunity to integrate the realisation of digital inclusivity within emerging economic strategies.

- For children and young people their educational performance can be significantly improved by home access to digital services and the internet and research has shown that it can boost their lifetime earnings. People with good ICT skills earn between 3 and 10 percent more than people without such skills (PwC, 2009).

- Digital inclusion is crucial to achieving priorities for health and social care organisations and teams, as well as, having a strong benefits case. The benefits for patients and carers can include improved self-care for minor ailments, improved self-management of long-term conditions, time and cost saved through accessing services digitally, reduced loneliness and isolation. For the health and care system, the benefits include more appropriate use of services, including primary and urgent care, better patience adherence to medicines and treatment and lower cost of delivering services.

- There are benefits for society and a return on investment in increasing digital inclusion and capability. A 2014 report from BT on valuing digital inclusion, calculated the social return on investment (SROI) of digital inclusion for individuals and for workers. For individuals, getting online is worth around £1,000 a year due to increase confidence, less social isolation, financial savings and opportunities in employment and leisure. For workers, getting online is worth around £3,500 a year due to opportunities for remote working and increased earnings opportunities.

- Each contact made by the public with a service deliverer, and each transaction they conduct online which was previously not done online could save the service provider between £3 and £12 per transaction (*Delivering digital inclusion,* 2010: 4-5, citing PwC 2009).

2. Approach

2.1 To successfully develop, introduce and embed digital inclusion and capabilities; it is proposed that this new strategy will be a corporate strategy, linking closely to existing and emerging strategies, including equality and diversity.

2.2 There are a number of services across the council that have a part to play in delivering digital inclusion and capability, therefore the strategy will be developed in collaboration with those services as a cross council strategy.

2.3 KCC cannot tackle digital inclusion and capability on its own and will need to work with partners and stakeholders, such as district and borough councils, other public service organisations, voluntary and community sector organisations, schools and colleges; the strategy will be developed in collaboration with our partners and stakeholders.

3. Initial Design Principles

It is envisaged that a new strategy should be prepared over the next six months. Some key principles to underpin its development include:

3.1 **Based on evidence:** The credibility of the strategy will depend on the line of sight between the evidence of need across the county and the policies and actions it sets out.

3.2 **Looking five years out:** It would make sense to put a time horizon of around five years on the strategy. This can allow it to be sufficiently focussed on the 'big picture', rather than just the immediate actions (for which it will provide a framework) and to set out the longer-term ambition. It is not proposed to plan ahead for longer than that, given that technological advances are likely to continue to be rapid and ever-changing.

3.3 **Ownership:** Despite the strategy being owned by KCC, we will be developing the strategy in conjunction with our key partners and stakeholders, with the view that the strategy can be adopted by these partners.

3.4 **Impact**: The strategy can provide a framework through which a range of actions can come forward. It will also have a clear route to deliverability: it should be ambitious and aspirational, but (linked with the 'evidence' point above) should avoid making 'asks' and proposals that are unlikely to have a credible business case.

4. Scope of the Strategy

Digital Inclusion and Capabilities is a broad and extensive area, particularly post-pandemic. Therefore, we have identified these key themes as part of the scope of the strategy:

4.1 **Digital Accessibility:** A key element of digital inclusion and capability is accessibility. It is important that digital services are designed to meet the needs of the users, which can be wide-ranging and varying. The public sector already has guidance to ensure that we meet the requirements of digital accessibility for digital websites and apps (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps). Further obligations are set out within the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure adjustments are in place and alternative formats are available.

We will work with KCC's digital accessibility team to support existing working, ensuring that we have a coordinated approach to digital inclusion. In addition, we will work with the Digital Accessibility Group facilitated by the county wide Kent Connects Group.

4.2 **Digital Connectivity:** Digital connectivity is also an important element of digital inclusion, to ensure that Kent's communities have access to good and reliable connections.

We will work with KCC's broadband team to support existing work[i], policies and agreements, liaising with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and Building Digital UK (BDUK), to ensure that the strategy is coordinated, both on a local level and a national level.

4.3 **Digital Skills**: Skills and training to access and fully participate digitally is important both internally for our workforce, but also for our communities, to enhance the opportunities and realise the benefits of a digitally included and connected society.

We will work with KCC's Digital Champions Lead within the People & Communications directorate to ensure that the strategy aligns with the current work programme and capabilities of the Digital Champion's scheme. We will work both internally and with external stakeholders to enhance the existing digital champions/ambassador schemes, maximising the cohesion of approach and delivery.

4.4 **Digital Transformation**: Following the pandemic, there has been a shift for many organisations across the UK in the way in which they deliver their services and realising benefits and reduced costs from doing so. There is a risk that services are then harder to access for those that are digitally excluded.

We will work with KCC's Strategic Reset Programme and the directorate innovation teams to ensure that this new strategy, realises the transactional benefits of being digital for the service provider, but also empowers service users to access these services digitally. This new strategy will provide framework to support inclusion and capability to be embedded into the design and delivery of digital solutions and services across KCC, empowering users to access these services in a which meets their needs.

4.5 **Leading Digital Inclusion & Capabilities**: The strategy could aim to position the local authority as a leader in this space, championing inclusion and linking the strategy to corporate policies, including strategic plans, asset management, budgeting and financial plans, delivery plans, equality and diversity and so on.

We will work with KCC commissioners and procurement to explore how we can enhance and influence our supply chain to improve digital inclusion and capability across the Kent communities.

Working with borough, city and district councils will be key to tackling digital exclusion across the county and the strategy could be a blue-print or used to support their own digital direction and transformation.

The strategy could include wider impacts and benefits:

- Environmental – this strategy can support the environmental recovery of Kent, through digital transformation (reducing travel between sites by the workforce and our service users) and how we dispose of digital hardware, which can be done in an environmentally and sustainably appropriate way.
- Economic – this strategy can support the economic recovery for Kent and the government's levelling up agenda., realising the reduction in the cost per transaction for service providers, but also enable Kent residents to realise the benefits of being digitally included, which could result in a wider-range of job opportunities, as we move into a more connected and flexible economic environment, where the geographical barriers are being redesigned.
- Social – this strategy can support the social recovery of Kent keeping people connected.

This will solidify KCC's priorities and aspirations around digital inclusion and capability, further strengthening the alignment between existing and future activity in this space, both within the organisation and with partners. An underpinning single conversation with key stakeholders including local partners, government departments and the private sector, which could in time attract additional resource and/or investment.

4.6 **Other Areas within Scope**: As part of the scoping and evidence base exercises, further areas may be identified in relation to the strategy. These will be considered and brought to the relevant Cabinet Committee for a decision.

5. **Proposed Timetable and Work Plan**

The indicative timetable and work plan is anticipated as follows:

5.1 **Scoping** (November); including initial comments from Members.

5.2 **Evidence base** (November – December): Development of a consolidated evidence base, drawing on standard data sources, published materials and papers taking a deeper view of some topics that are likely to be relevant to the strategy.

5.3 **Storyboard** (December): Initial synthesis of evidence and emerging themes and the development of a framework for consideration.

5.4 **Engagement** (January – February): Consultation with key stakeholders on the emerging draft framework.

5.5 **Draft Strategy** (March – April), for consideration by Members and key partners and stakeholders.

5.6 There may be a case for a formal consultation before the Strategy is finalised. This will be considered in the scoping phase, and the timetable maybe updated as part of this.

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6. Recommendation(s):

6.1 The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the development of a corporate strategy for digital inclusion and capability that is:
- led by KCC's Digital Lead (Digital Inclusion & Capability)
- corporately owned by Strategic & Corporate Services as outlined in Section 2 of this report.
- designed based on the principles as outlined in Section 3 of this report.

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6. Contact Details

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Relevant Director:

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance
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[i] KCC's broadband team is working with Building Digital UK (BDUK) to support the local delivery of a number of government-led initiatives to improve broadband connectivity. These programmes, which include the BDUK Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme and the Superfast Broadband Programme, have focussed on areas which remain outside the scope of market-

led investment (i.e. work will not benefit from an upgrade funded by telecom operators). To date, this work has been delivered faster broadband connections to over 143,000 homes and businesses across Kent that would otherwise have been left with a poor broadband connection.

The new Project Gigabit Programme, for which the government has already allocated between £119m - £203m for improving broadband connectivity across Kent and Medway.

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From: **Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

              Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 9th November 2021**

Subject: **Kent Connects Partnership Update**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All electoral divisions

Summary: Kent Connects is a Partnership of public sector bodies in Kent, focussing on IT and digital technology to support the delivery of their services to the county. It delivers a range of services including infrastructure, through the Kent Public Services Network **(**KPSN) Partnership, collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing through specialist groups and business transformation events.

Recommendation(s):

The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked **to note** progress to date and the development of the Partnership.

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1.   **Introduction**

1.1   Kent Connects is a Partnership of public sector bodies in Kent that seeks to leverage technology and digital services to support the county's objectives to grow the economy, tackle disadvantage and put citizens in control. The Partnership was established in 2001 as part of the government's e-gov programme.

1.2   The seventeen partners include; Kent County Council (KCC), Medway Council, all twelve districts Councils, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, and all three Kent universities.

1.3   By bringing together the knowledge and expertise of local councils, blue light organisations and universities, Kent Connects provides a framework to connect and support public service delivery across the county of Kent. This includes a range of services from infrastructure through the KPSN Partnership, collaborative projects, training and development, networking and knowledge sharing through specialist groups and business transformation events.

1.4   Annual business transformation events are held either face to face or remotely and are free to attend for all partners.

2.   Governance and Funding

2.1   The Partnership is directed through the Kent Connects Leadership Group, with all partners paying a subscription to join the group. Nine of the seventeen partners pay a higher subscription.

2.2   Part of the annual subscription goes into a development fund, which is used to support Partnership Projects. Business Cases for funding requests are presented to the Leadership Board for assessment with successful projects feeding back to the Leadership Group with project outcomes and shared learning.

3.   Kent Connects Groups

3.1   The Partnership holds quarterly meetings for the following specialist groups: Leadership Group, Information Security, Digital Accessibility, GIS and Smart Kent and Medway Projects. Apart from the Leadership Group, these are open to all partners.

3.2   Leadership Group: this manages the direction of the Partnership, awards funding to collaborative projects that are identified and delivered through the specialist groups.

3.3   The Information Security Group has regular reports from the National Cyber Security Centre and shares knowledge and good practice. The group is currently running Cyber Security workshops for partners focussing on the combined work of IT and Emergency Planning Officers.

3.4   The Digital Accessibility Group is developing guidance to promote a Kent Digital Accessibility standard. There is also a project with the University of Kent and Smarter Digital Services to produce a range of e-learning materials which will be available to all partners to load on their e-learning systems or access from a shared e-learning system.

3.5   The GIS group has a focus on data sharing opportunities across the Partnership and has previously conducted a data drill to test the maturity of the data sharing across multiple organisations.

3.6   The Smart Kent and Medway Projects group builds on conversations between partners that started at the Smart Kent business transformation event held by Kent Connects. Its role is to identify and take forward projects with an environmental focus.

4.   Kent Connects Projects

4.1   Kent Connects' funding is used to implement projects that will benefit the majority of the Partnership. Examples below show a range of projects that have received funding:

4.1.1   GovRoam was funded through Kent Connects to allow this to be rolled out to the whole county.

4.1.2   Four e-learning courses on Cyber Security were developed jointly by the partners and funding was used to put content into the right format for partners to load onto their own e-learning systems.

4.1.3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Leadership Group approved funding for two projects identified by the multi-agency Financial Hardship Group.

4.2 Current projects include:

4.2.1 An e-learning approach for the Partnership, which will deliver courses and provide regular updates to the content. The first modules will focus on Digital Accessibility available through an e-learning system which partners can access directly and also as packages to be loaded into individual organisation's e-learning systems.

4.2.2 Funding for a booking system and IT support for the Shared Workplace Programme, allowing partners to book desks and collaboration spaces at each other's offices.

4.2.3 Kent Connects working with the KPSN Partnership to develop sensor projects looking at data ranging from temperature levels and usage of buildings to pollution and traffic levels across the county.

5.   Events

5.1 Kent Connects provide regular business transformation events for partners. The events take a strategic view with speakers from other public sector organisations, private sector, voluntary organisations and think tanks to inform and engage senior managers across the Partnership. Past events have focussed on Smart Cities and Counties, Cyber Security, Digital Accessibility and Data Sharing in an emergency.

5.2 The next event will focus on Future Workplaces and presenters will discuss different workstyles, explore culture change as we move towards more hybrid working solutions and provide an update on our Partnership Shared Workspaces programme.

6.   Equalities implications

6.1 None

7.   Other corporate implications

7.1 The Kent Connects Project Management Office are managed within KCC's Infrastructure Division and work closely with the ICT Team.

8.   Conclusions

8.1 The Kent Connects Partnership continues to work together successfully to deliver projects and knowledge sharing groups and events. Working together as a Partnership has strengthened links between public sector organisations in Kent.

9.   Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked **to note** progress to date and the development of the Partnership.

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10. Background Documents

10.1   None

11. Contact Details

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From: Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Corporate and Traded Services

Ben Watts, General Counsel

To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee – 9 November 2021

Subject: **Work Programme 2022**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Standard item

Summary: This report gives details of the proposed work programme for the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee.

Recommendation: The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked to **consider** and **agree** its planned work programme for 2022

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1.   Introduction

1.1   The proposed Work Programme has been compiled from items on the Forthcoming Executive Decision List, from actions arising from previous meetings and from topics identified at agenda setting meetings, held 6 weeks before each Cabinet Committee meeting, in accordance with the Constitution, and attended by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and group spokesmen.

1.2   Whilst the Chairman, in consultation with the Cabinet Members, is responsible for the final selection of items for the agenda, this item gives all Members of the Cabinet Committee the opportunity to suggest amendments and additional agenda items where appropriate.

2.   Terms of Reference

2.1   At its meeting held on 27 March 2014, the County Council agreed the following terms of reference for the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee "To be responsible for those functions that fall within the Strategic and Corporate Services Directorate" and these should also inform the suggestions made by Members for appropriate matters for consideration.

3.   Work Programme 2022

3.1   The Cabinet Committee is requested to consider and note the items within the proposed Work Programme, set out in the appendix to this report, and to suggest any additional topics to be considered for inclusion on the agenda of future meetings.

3.2   The schedule of commissioning activity that falls within the remit of this Cabinet Committee will be included in the Work Programme and is considered at

agenda setting meetings to support more effective forward agenda planning and allow Members to have oversight of significant services delivery decisions in advance.

3.3 When selecting future items, the Cabinet Committee should consider performance monitoring reports. Any 'for information' or briefing items will be sent to Members of the Cabinet Committee separately to the agenda or separate member briefings will be arranged where appropriate.

4. Conclusion

4.1 It is important for the Cabinet Committee process that the Committee takes ownership of its work programme to help the Cabinet Members to deliver informed and considered decisions. A regular report will be submitted to each meeting of the Cabinet Committee to give updates on requested topics and to seek suggestions for future items to be considered. This does not preclude Members making requests to the Chairman or the Democratic Services Officer between meetings for consideration.

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5. Recommendation: The **Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee** is asked to **consider** and **agree** its planned work programme for 20/22

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6. Background Documents
None.

7. Contact details

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POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2022

19 January 2022		
• **Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan**	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton	Annual
• **Covid Finance update**	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton	Standing item to every other meeting
• **Strategic and Corporate Service Directorate Performance Dashboard**	Rachel Kennard	Every other meeting
• **Update on Strategic Headquarters**	Rebecca Spore	Moved from September meeting
• **Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent**	Debra Exall	Annual
• **Total Facilities Management**	James Sanderson Tony Carty	Six-monthly
• **Annual Equality and Diversity Report**	David Whittle	Annual – standing item Moved from November meeting
• **Proposed freehold acquisition of the school land (Simon Langton for Boys)** – decision	Rebecca Spore	Moved from November meeting
• **Playing field development at the Wildernesse site** – decision	Hugh D'Alton Karen Frearson	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21
• **Facilities Management Procurement** - decision	Karen Ripley James Sanderson	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21
• **Disposal of Wayfarers Care Home, Sandwich** – decision	Karen Frearson Alister Fawley	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21
• **Disposal of 50 Gibson Drive, Kings Hill** – decision	Karen Frearson Alister Fawley	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21

Last updated 1 November 2021

• **Disposal of Phase II Youth Centre Site, Station Road, New Romney** – decision	Karen Frearson Alister Fawley	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21
• **Construction Partnership Framework Commission – For Decision** incl update on framework requested at 13 July mtg	Rebecca Spore James Sanderson Rob Clark	Moved from November meeting
• **Herne Bay Library Modernisation** – decision	James Sanderson	Added by Infrastructure 7 Oct 21
• **Trading Success, Education Supplies (W17, W18 and W26)**	Vincent Godfrey	Added by author, 22 Oct 21
• **Kent County Council's Owner's Requirement Statement**	Jenny Dixon-Sherreard David Whittle	
• **Report on data dashboard of Freedom of Information requests -** arising from Information Goververnance item at 22 Sept mtg	Ben Watts	Arose at 22 Sept mtg
• **Work Programme 2022**		
23 March 2022 * *meeting dates are currently being reviewed – any revised dates will be confirmed as soon as possible*		
• **Risk Management (Incl RAG ratings)**	Mark Scrivener	Annual
• **Contract Management Review Group update (Exempt)**	Michael Bridger	Bi-annual – standing item
• **Cyber Security**	Rebecca Spore	Annual
• **Update on Asset Management Plan**	TBC	
• **Work Programme 2022**		

Last updated 1 November 2021

10 June 2022 *		
• **Strategic and Corporate Service Directorate Performance Dashboard** •	Rachel Kennard	Every other meeting
• **Covid Finance update**	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton	Standing item to every other meeting
• **Work Programme 2022**		

PATTERN OF REGULAR ITEMS (this is the pattern in a 'normal' year – 2021/22 is different due to covid-19)

JANUARY	Annual	Draft Revenue and Capital Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton
	Annual	Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent	Debra Exall
	Six-monthly	Total Facilities Management	Rebecca Spore
	Every other meeting	Covid Finance (as long as is needed) and then regular Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) update	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton
	Every other meeting	Strategic and Corporate Service Directorate Performance Dashboard	David Whittle Rachel Kennard
MARCH	Annual	Risk Management (Including RAG ratings)	David Whittle Mark Scrivener
	Annual	Cyber Security	*Rebecca Spore?*
	Six-monthly	Contract Management Review Group update	Clare Maynard Michael Bridger

Last updated 1 November 2021

MAY	**Every other meeting**	Covid Finance (as long as is needed) and then regular MTFP update	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton
	Every other meeting	Strategic and Corporate Service Directorate Performance Dashboard	David Whittle Rachel Kennard
JULY			
SEPTEMBER	**Annual**	Annual Equality and Diversity Report (in 2022 moved down to January)	David Whittle
	Six-monthly	Contract Management Review Group update	Clare Maynard Michael Bridger
	Six-monthly	Total Facilities Management	Rebecca Spore
	Every other meeting	Covid Finance (as long as is needed) and then regular MTFP update	Zena Cooke Dave Shipton
	Every other meeting	Strategic and Corporate Service Directorate Performance Dashboard	David Whittle Rachel Kennard
NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER			

Last updated 1 November 2021

From: **Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**

Rebecca Spore Director of Infrastructure

To: **Policy and Resources Committee - 9ᵗʰ November 2021**

Subject: **Disposal of land South of Steele Avenue, Greenhithe, Dartford DA9 9AE**

Classification: **UNRESTRICTED Report**

EXEMPT Appendix 2 – not for publication. Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, refers.

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: Dartford East, Penny Cole

Summary: This paper relates to the intention to dispose of land (approximately 1.29 acres) bounded by Steele Avenue, King Edward Road and the A206 / St Clements Way at Greenhithe. This paper sets out the 3 options considered and the decision to progress with the disposal of the site.

Recommendation(s)

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is **asked to consider** and **endorse** or make **recommendations** to the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services** on the proposed decision to agree to complete the disposal of the land at South Steele Avenue, King Edward Road, Dartford and delegate authority to:

1. The Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal.
2. The Director of Infrastructure to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above.

1. Site Context

1.1. The immediate area around the site is predominantly residential and some retail:

- To the west, a mix of two-storey terraced and detached houses.
- The A206 St Clements Way forms the east site boundary and the border with Swanscombe. Beyond the main road is more residential.

- To the north lies road and rail infrastructure and Greenhithe Station and a 24-hour supermarket.
- South of the site has seen recent residential development, including three and four-storey apartments. Approximately 1.5km south is the Bluewater shopping centre.

1.2 The mostly vacant site attracts minimal holding costs (car park rates and minor maintenance).

1.3 The 1.29-acre site was acquired by Kent County Council in 1973 for the purposes of future road infrastructure works.

1.4 The site has an Easement in favour of Thames Water Utilities and surface water drainage rights granted in relation to the King Edward Road frontage. These rights will be investigated as part of the Title Report in due course.

1.5 There is an unused underground tram tunnel running under the east boundary of the site. Further investigation of this tunnel will be necessary as part of detailed development proposals.

2. Occupational History

2.1 In 2016, the site was let under a short-term lease to a hand car wash and parking business. This lease was terminated to enable use of the land as a depot for major road works by KCC Highways in 2018. Those road works required some of the original site to be incorporated into the highway to allow for the A206 to be widened.

2.2. The creation of the works unit depot site included, at the North end of the site, the creation of a 30-space car park accessed from Steele Avenue for use by highway workers.

2.3. This small part of the overall site therefore remains in use as a free car park for residents and commuters from nearby Greenhithe station. The car parking use will need to be brought to an end to facilitate the disposal. There is a c.60 space, pay and display car park in Eagles Road to the North of Greenhithe Station, approximately 5 minutes' walk from the station, a similar distance to Steele Avenue car park.

2.4. Aside from the existing car park, the remainder (and majority) of the overall site is currently vacant hardstanding and gravelled areas.

3. History – Planning

3.1 In planning terms, the site is within the defined urban area of the Borough and is non-allocated 'white land' on the proposals map of the development plan. White land is land with no specific proposal for allocation in a development plan, where it is intended that existing uses shall remain.

3.2. While the site was not identified in the 2010 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2020/2021 (SHLAA 2020) as deliverable or developable for residential use, the site is identified for potential mixed-use development including a community facility in the SHLAA 2020. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020

(IDP 2020) identifies it as the potential site for a new primary care facility. Both these documents support the Pre-Submission Draft Dartford Local Plan Feb 2021, but this only carries limited weight in decision making at the current time.

3.3. Dartford Borough Council (DBC) has also identified this land in the Borough Council's Brownfield Land Register and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) refers to plans being developed by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), GP practices and Kent County Council for a new primary care facility on this site. However, these documents form part of the evidence base of the emerging Local Plan and therefore carry only limited weight in decision making given the draft status of the Plan.

3.4. The site is proposed for allocation as a green buffer within the draft Stone Neighbourhood Plan (Policy GS4). However, at the meeting of its Cabinet on 27 May 2021, DBC resolved to formally object to Policy GS4.

3.5. Separately, KCC has made representations against the draft neighbourhood plan and has also submitted representations to the reissued draft DBC Local Plan.

3.6. Architects were appointed by KCC to work with a planning consultant and a broadly positive pre-application response was received on 15 June 2021. DBC accepted the principle of development of the site to provide a medical centre and residential development.

3.7. Given that the CCG have indicated that they have a requirement for a medical facility in the locality to accommodate three GP surgeries in the area, KCC have been in discussions with the CCG as to the use of Part 1 of the site for this purpose. Dartford Borough Council are also holding Community Infrastructure Levy ("CIL") funding to contribute towards the provision of any healthcare development.

4. Disposal options and marketing

4.1 The following options were considered for the disposal of the site

    4.1.1 Open market sale of the whole site (Parts 1 and 2), on conditional and unconditional bases.

    4.1.2 Split the site and KCC deliver the medical centre (Part 1) and either hold or dispose of the investment. Disposal of the remainder of the site (Part 2) on the open market.

    4.1.3 Split the site with a conditional sale to a specialist developer via an open market process for a medical centre (Part 1) and conditional disposal of the remainder of the site (Part 2) on the open market.

4.2 Following consideration of the options and the risk profile (see Exempt Appendix for more details) it is recommended to proceed with the option at 4.1.3 above as this presents the best opportunity to maximise the value of the site and limit KCC's exposure to risk. It also enables the CCG to progress with its GP surgery relocation plans.

5. Marketing

5.1 The whole site was marketed by the specialist healthcare team within Avison Young with offers only invited for Part 1 of the site.

5.2 Offers for Part 1 of the site were received from 6 parties in August 2021. The agents reverted to the 4 highest bidders seeking clarification on the more detailed terms.

5.3 Following the initial bid appraisal and due diligence, a summary of the 4 final bids is set out in the exempt appendix which shows the current lead bidder.

5.4 The heads of terms are currently being developed.

6. Financial Considerations

6.1 The Exempt Appendix sets out the financial considerations in more detail. The sites will be disposed of in accordance with the Council's statutory and fiduciary obligations. The site is surplus to KCC requirements and will generate a capital receipt to support the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the delivery of KCC's capital programme.

6.2 Once the land sale transaction completes (estimated to be in July 2022 subject to securing planning and CCG / DV approval), KCC will no longer have the holding liabilities associated with a vacant property. These include rates and any required maintenance.

7. Governance

7.1 Appropriate processes have been followed to ensure best value through the targeted marketing of the Part 1 site. Solicitors will be appointed to act in respect of the structure and execution of the sale, in consultation with KCC's own Head of Law and the Office of General Counsel.

7.2. Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA). KCC will not be handling any personal data. The appointed agent is sighted of the personal data for any interested parties and the agent does not pass personal data to KCC.

7.3. Equalities Impact Assessment (EQUIA). There are no equalities impacts as a result of this decision.

8. Consultations

8.1 The local member has been kept informed and updated on the progress of this site.

8.2 A meeting was also held with the Chairman and Councillors from Stone Parish Council. The Parish Council would prefer the medical facility to be located at Atlas Park (a new development proposed at Stone Cross, identified on the location map

at Appendix 1) for which a planning consent has been granted. However, the Parish Councillors are aware of the urgent need for a new medical centre to serve not only Stone but also Greenhithe and Swanscombe.

8.3 The CCG continue to express a preference for a new medical facility at Steele Avenue which is central to the areas it would serve, as can be seen on the location map at Appendix 1.

8.4 The Parish Councillors fear the loss of the medical centre from Atlas Park to Steele Avenue will prevent the additional facilities being provided at Atlas Park.

9. Next Steps and Timing

9.1 The Key Milestones are:

Nov/Dec	Decision making governance.
Feb 2022	Developer finalises designs for the medical centre with tenants.
Apr 2022	GPs Outline Business Case agreed with the CCG.
	Planning Application submitted to Dartford Borough Council.
Jun 2022	Planning consent granted (assume no objections / appeal).
Jul 2022	If outline planning consent is granted for residential development on the Part 2 site, KCC can tender and appoint agents to consider marketing Part 2.
Aug 2022	Approval of NHS Value for Money Report from the District Valuer.
	KCC completes land sale to developer.
	Developer starts work on site.
Sep 2023	Practical completion.

10. Recommendation(s)

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is **asked to consider** and **endorse** or make **recommendations** to the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services** on the proposed decision to agree to complete the disposal of the land at South Steele Avenue, King Edward Road, Dartford and delegate authority to:

1. the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal.

2. The Director of Infrastructure to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above.

11. Background documents

Appendix 1 – Site plan
Appendix 2 – Exempt report

12. Author Details

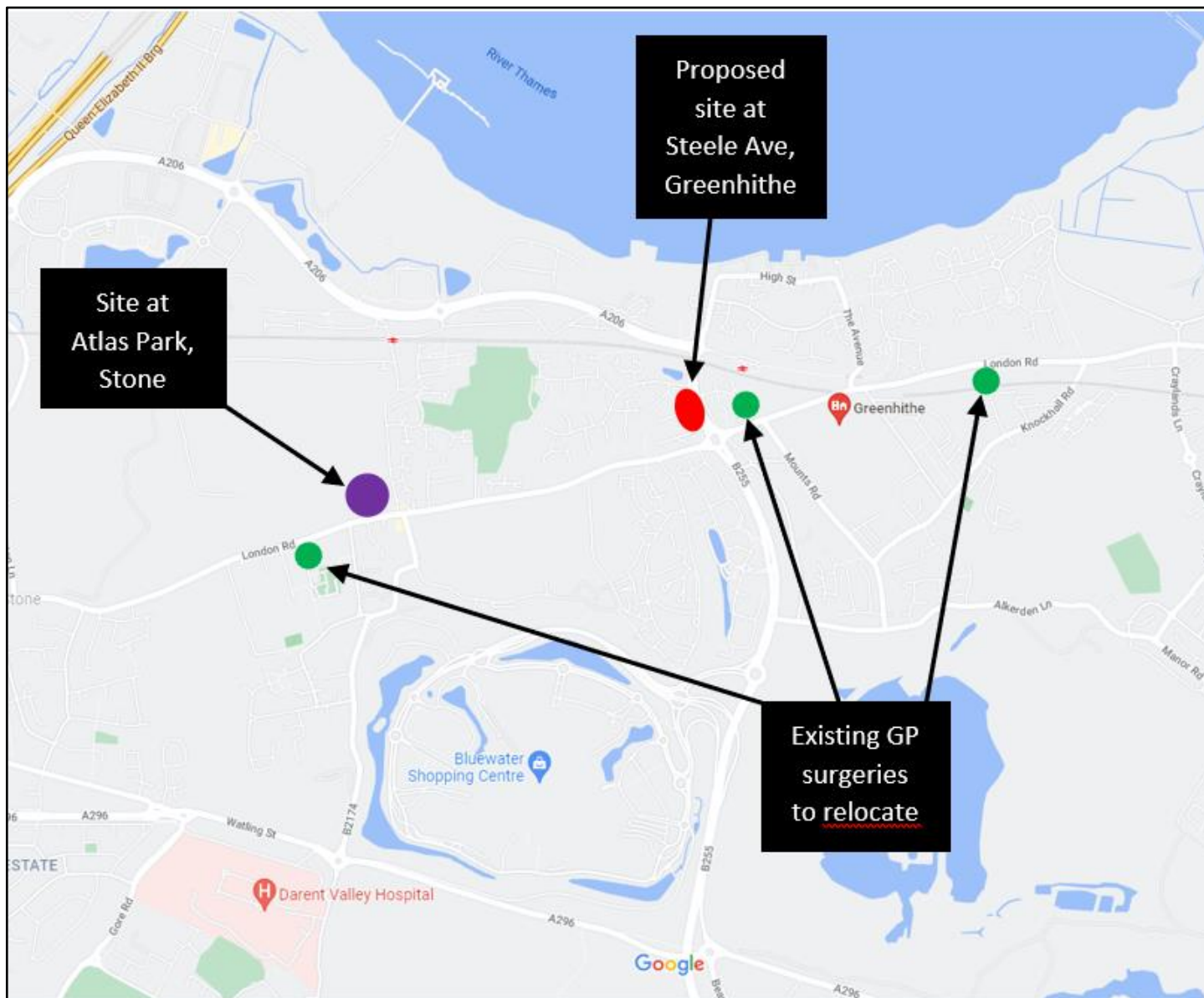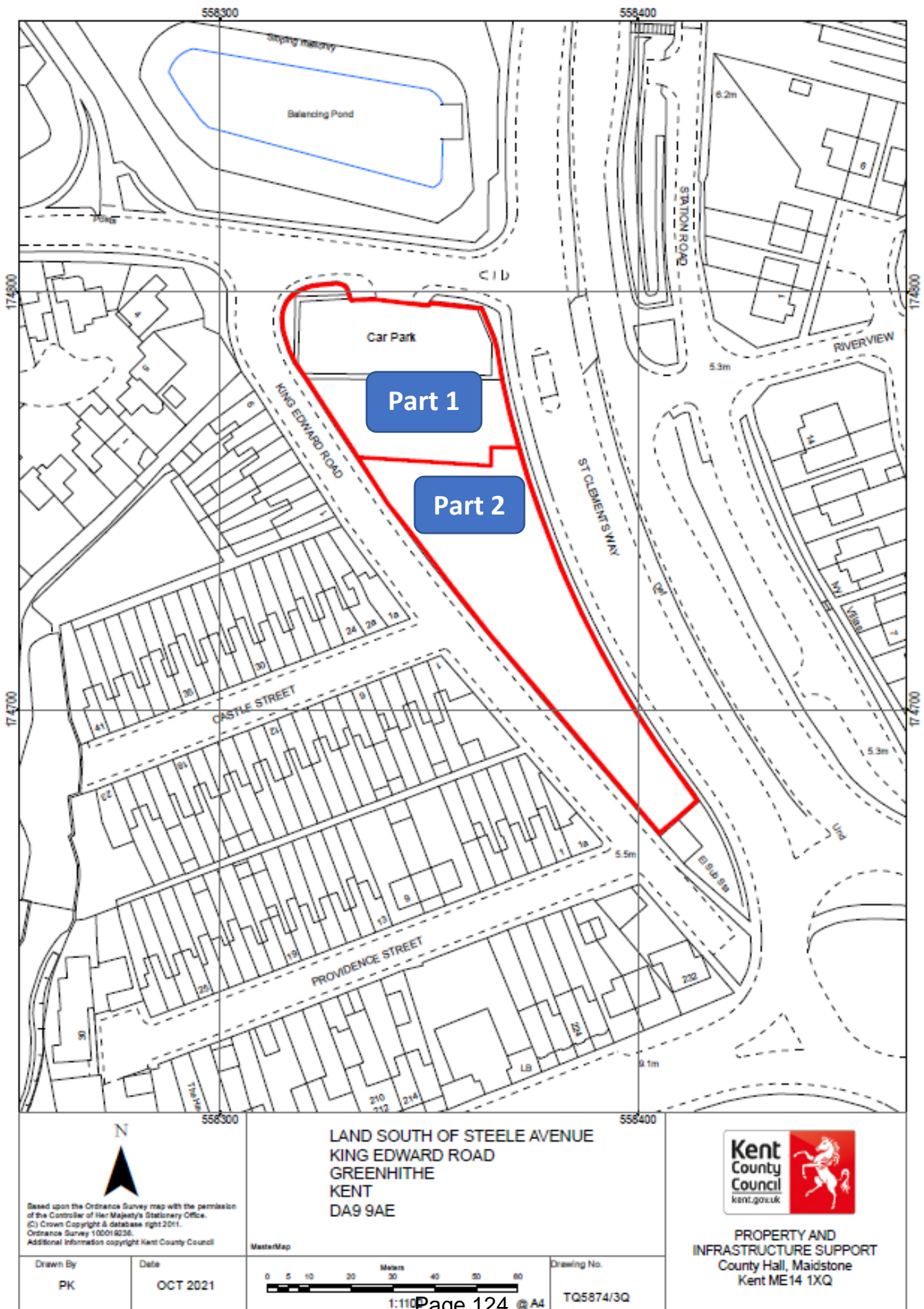| Alister Fawley – Disposal and Investment	Rebecca Spore – Director of Infrastructure
03000 419951 alister.fawley@kent.gov.uk **Simon Hocken – Consultant Disposals Surveyor** 07824 504426 Simon.hocken@kent.gov.uk	03000 416716 rebecca.spore@kent.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1 – Location and Site plans

1. Location Plan

2. Site plan identifying the split between Part 1 (medical centre) and Part 2 (residential) sites

Part 1

Part 2

LAND SOUTH OF STEELE AVENUE
KING EDWARD ROAD
GREENHITHE
KENT
DA9 9AE

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

PROPERTY AND
INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT
County Hall, Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XQ

Drawn By	Date		Drawing No.
PK	OCT 2021	1:110	TQ5874/3Q @A4

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MasterMap

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY: **Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**	DECISION NO: 21/00100

For publication *[Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]*

Key decision: YES

Key decision criteria. The decision will:
  a) *result in savings or expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000);*

Subject Matter / Title of Decision:
Disposal of land South of Steele Avenue, **Greenhithe**, Dartford DA9 9AE

Decision:

As the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**, I agree to authorise the disposal of the sites and delegate authority to:

1. The **Director of Infrastructure** in consultation with the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal.

2. The **Director of Infrastructure** to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above.

Reason(s) for decision:
KCC Highways operations from the site closed in 2018 and the site was subsequently declared surplus to operational requirements and suitable for disposal.

The eventual sale of the property will result in a capital receipt for KCC which will be used to support the Council's Capital Programme.

Proposed surplus property disposal is in line with KCC's statutory and fiduciary obligations.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

To be discussed at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 9th November 2021.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

The site has been declared surplus by Kent County Council and, as such, there are no operational requirements for it. Where Kent County Council has no reason to hold on to assets, it should dispose of them in line with its statutory and fiduciary obligations.

Before concluding the most viable option of disposing of the site in two stages, officers undertook investigations and took account of advice from the market, Dartford Borough Council's Planning Department and the views of the local community. On balance the integration of a medical hub at this site will provide community benefit along with a capital receipt that accords with market value.

Alternatives such as leaving the site undeveloped and to focus development wholly as residential were considered and rejected.

The medical centre site has been marketed by a specialist primary care / commercial property agent, owing to the specialist nature of primary care development and the short timetable for delivery. Different marketing methods (e.g. site advertising boards, advertisements in the property press and using less specialised property agents) were considered and rejected as inappropriate for the specific circumstances of procuring a medical centre.
.

In securing the best value for the site, the planning position underpins the value. In this case, obtaining a consent in advance of sale and an unconditional sale approach were both considered and it was concluded that working with the preferred developer under a conditional sale contract optimised KCC's financial return on the one hand and enabled KCC to control its exposure to risk on the other.

The site will be sold in 2 stages. The first stage for the medical centre and the second stage to be the subject of a further marketing campaign

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

....
signed

....
Date

01/decision/glossaries/FormC   2

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3, 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY: **Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**	**DECISION NO:** 21/00099

For publication

Key decision - No

Subject Matter / Title of Decision:
Works at Tennyson Lodge and Thomas Place, Maidstone, Kent

Proposed Decision:

As **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services,** I agree to progress the required works and related activity as detailed in the recommendations as set out within the exempt report and delegate authority to:

1. The **Director of Infrastructure**, in consultation with the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services** and **KCC General Counsel**, to take necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into any contracts and legal agreements, required to deliver the works.

Reason(s) for decision:

A decision is required to confirm the progression of and approach to necessary works needed at the relevant properties. Detailed arrangements and considerations are set out within the exempt report.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

To be updated on Record of Decision in due course.

Any alternatives considered:

As set out within the exempt report.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

....
Signed   date

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