

Swale Borough Council's COVID – 19 Recovery Plan Update May 2021

Introduction

The Council's COVID – 19 Recovery Plan was first agreed by Cabinet on the 8th July 2020. It was agreed that the document would be in draft as it would evolve over time through the pandemic. The plan was discussed in a member forum on 22nd July 2020 to help shape it and allow member involvement at that time. Feedback was taken into account when the plan was updated in September 2020 and presented as an appendix to the Corporate Plan which was adopted by Council.

This document provides an update and refresh of the plan given the progress and developments that have occurred since September 2020.

The government's overarching approach to recovery was published in June 2020 in a 50-page recovery strategy (our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy). Since that time the nation has been focused on dealing with both response phases and recovery phases in respect of the pandemic. In June the council started to plan for recovery (hence this plan being developed) but come September 2020 it was clear that the country was heading into another response phase as COVID rates began to rise and as a result, tiered restrictions introduced in October 2020 and then November 2020 saw the second full national 'lockdown' until March 2021.

This Plan had identified that this recovery would be unique and would not be lineal and this has borne out to date with various spikes in rates and the virus mutating. This placed heavy demand on our NHS resulting in returning back to emergency/ response approaches. This has only started to ease following the lockdown when rates began to fall and when the vaccine started to roll out in February 2021. This has allowed Government to look at easing restrictions which it set out in its 'roadmap' – COVID19 Response Spring 2021. This has resulted in the ability to start to plan once again for recovery – a year after the pandemic started, with new government initiatives and funding associated with it.

We have learnt a lot in the past year and it still remains that recovery may require some form of realignment of services and processes of the council, with short, medium and long-term choices to make. This plan helps to focus those choices and determine priorities. What is clear is that we still face huge challenges both nationally and locally, and the need to be flexible and agile is still of upmost importance. Working together with our partners is crucial as is timely messaging and support to our residents when needed.

Progress since September 2020

The Action Plan in Table One provides an update of progress against actions first agreed in June 2020. Given this is the Recovery Plan, not all actions have progressed as anticipated or have evolved slightly. This is due to the significant amount of work that has taken place to manage our response to the pandemic, which is very much interlinked. In summary, the council has worked tirelessly to:

- Support, through grants schemes, businesses adversely impacted;
- Help the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) to shield;
- Enable the community sector to support people in hardship;
- Secure rough sleepers accommodation;
- Ensure its compliance and safety responsibilities are taken seriously and worked with partners to ensure we encourage people to follow the guideline through the different stages of the pandemic, including increasing our marshal presence in the public realm; and
- Support Public Health and the NHS establish testing centres, vaccination sites and test and trace in the borough.

What is the Recovery Plan?

It is an attempt to set out the different phases of recovery as we move through them with associated actions and priorities. We originally were working to immediate (June – Sept 2020), medium term (October - March 2021) and longer term (March 2021 +). It could be suggested that the medium term timescale was replaced by the response phase and as such medium term recovery would now be considered April 2021 – March 2022 and longer term April 2022+. This would align with the new funding that the council has received which has been extended beyond 31st March 2021.

The plan was prepared as robustly as possible, balancing the need to sustain core services, to continue with the Administration's programme of change and to meet the pressures of what will be a changed social and economic environment. Coronavirus has amplified some of the issues the borough faces – struggling high streets, health inequalities - but it has also shown the strengths that it has – community spirit, quality open spaces. The Recovery Plan aims to address the underlying issues but also build on the strengths.

Why do we need a Recovery Plan?

To help focus and prioritise the council's approach and ensure that is a safe, sustainable, managed recovery. Also, as a statement to the borough and wider partners, of its commitment and the role it has to play.

Our recovery sits not only within the national framework, but also at a county level. In accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the County Council, along with District councils, have a statutory responsibility regarding recovery, with the county taking the lead as it effects more than one district. However, the council, working within this broader context, continues to develop its own response for its own activity, but also more broadly in relation to Swale's communities and economy. The framework will be used to assess both the impact and opportunities as a result of the pandemic, particularly in regard to changing trends and behaviours, social and environmental evolution, but also economic, social, environmental and health impacts.

What are the priorities for the Recovery Plan?

The Administration made clear its priorities in May 2019 and are articulated through the Corporate Plan. The pandemic has magnified these priorities and enhanced their relevance and importance for the borough and so the Recovery Plan focuses itself around these in terms of action related to recovery. These priorities for recovery are set out below with high level actions as they evolve in Table One.

Economic Improvement: Support our local economy so that it can survive and be strong, resilient, dynamic, and adaptable to change. Encourage a local economy that fosters good, clean, sustainable growth. Play our part in helping meet some of the immediate challenges the boroughs' economy now faces but also take advantage of the untapped potential, for longer-term benefit.

Affordable Housing: Provide sustainable housing for local people by pursuing all viable opportunities for increasing the supply of affordable and social housing across the borough. Work in partnership to respond to those in need of housing, anticipating demand as we move out of lockdown.

Climate and Environmental Emergency: Seize the opportunities arising from the pandemic to a renewed commitment to investing in our environment and addressing climate change. Explore new approaches as a result of behavioural change and its impact on the environment. Ensure ecological issues are not squeezed out.

Communities and Social Inclusion: Enable our communities to be resilient and cohesive. Capitalise on the community spirit engendered through the pandemic and our changed relationship with the voluntary and community sector as a result – supporting it to bring about social change and quality of life. Focus on the vulnerable groups hardest hit by the pandemic, and address health and wellbeing implications arising from it. Recognise the impact COVID has had on social isolation and respond accordingly.

Renewing Local Democracy and making the council fit for the future: Improve the council's engagement with communities and stakeholders across the borough to get buy in for a collective recovery. Be innovative in our ideas on how we do things as an organisation given the cultural, behavioural and environmental changes the pandemic presents.

Overarching/ Cross Cutting Themes

In addition to the priorities above, there are some overarching/ cross cutting themes that run throughout the approach to recovery:

Working in collaboration: The council is committed to working in collaboration with a wide range of partners to facilitate and enable recovery. The changed social and economic circumstances have provided an opportunity look again at the role public sector organisations, like the council, plays. There is no single agency responsible for 'delivering' recovery - we will need to work together. Success will depend on coordination across a range of partners and a communitarian approach to partnership working based on shared objectives, across the public, private and community sectors in Swale.

Communications and messaging: It is important that we communicate effectively and timely and get our messaging right so people know what the council is doing and how it is able to support them. Making the most of our assets and using the attributes of each area of Swale to promote places and the borough as a whole as a great place to visit and invest will be key to recovery. Recognising and promoting positive outcomes including reduced traffic and pollution, better work/life balance, community spirit.

The Local Plan Review: This major project pulls all other strands together. Driving good, sustainable growth through the Local Plan Review will address all the priorities – economic improvement, affordable housing and good design and standards, community infrastructure, climate change agenda and so on.

How will we deliver?

In terms of delivery structure and governance, Cabinet subgroups for priority areas were established and have continued to meet monthly. We also feed into the Kent wide recovery structure. Learning from the past year and building on the success of our community partnerships and work, the council is establishing a Hardship Recovery Group to focus on recovery in our community from a resilience and hardship point of view.

It has also engaged the services of the Local Government Association (LGA) Recovery and Renewal Panel, who will be coming in July 2021 to work with us to critique the Recovery Plan and help make recommendations for improvement.

The council will need to be mindful that recovery, as with response, has a huge potential impact on the Council's finances. Delivery will need to be within the financial parameters of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and ensure the ongoing financial viability of the council. There has been government and other external funding provided to the council up to this point, and this may or may not continue.

The council has secured various funding streams to help deliver its response work notably:

- Covid Contain Management Funding £530k in November 2020 and a further £265k April 2021 (plus grant from DHSC tbc)
- Outbreak control fund/ track/trace £50k plus £90k from MHCLG
- Winter Fund grants £108,656 (until April 2021)
- Emergency Assistance Grant £90k
- Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Grant £134,410 (until April 2021)
- EU Opening up the high streets Safely Grant £124k (until June 2021)
- Welcome Back Fund £220k (until April 2022)
- Business Grants totally £32,646,000
- Council Tax Hardship Grants £1,173,341
- National Leisure Recovery Grant £365k

Actions have already been undertaken to prepare a detailed estimate of the projected revenue budget impact so far of the pandemic. A base position has been established and is subject to regular review through the recovery phases, and impacts are based on a variety of assumptions, some for a limited period and others assuming an ongoing impact through the year and beyond.

What is our exit strategy out of recovery?

It is still hard to know when recovery will end, given the experience of the past year. With vaccination rollout progressing well, it is hoped a new normal way of life may resume by the summer, but likely to have to manage COVID in the longer term. Any withdrawal of support or focus will need to be managed sensitively and at the right time, working locally and collaboratively. A good example of this is our managed withdrawal from the community hub and CEV work. This has been made possible by looking at future support through mainstream services through the customer contact centre and in the community services team and health & wellbeing team.

Table One: Actions for focus

Priority	Areas of Focus – Short Term June – Sept 20	Areas of Focus Oct 20 – March 2021	Areas of Focus – Medium Term April 2021 – March 2022	Areas of Focus – Long Term April 2022+
Economic Improvement	<p>Deliver the various business grant schemes within the available funding allocation and in compliance with Government requirements</p> <p>Deliver the Councils existing business support service online</p> <p>Signpost to other business support as appropriate e.g. Kent Growth Hub</p>	<p>Continue to deliver the various business grant schemes within the available funding allocation and in compliance with Government requirements</p> <p>Deliver the Councils existing business support service online</p> <p>Signpost to other business support as appropriate e.g. Kent Growth Hub</p>	<p>Continue to deliver the various business support grants schemes within the available funding allocation and in compliance with Government requirements</p> <p>Review and revise our delivery of Business support in light of resources and funding available to do so</p> <p>Monitor evolving, wider business support landscape and lock into opportunities relevant to local businesses</p>	<p>Investigate the evolution of a 'one business account' approach within the Council</p> <p>Continue to review the Councils business support offer in light of resources and funding available to do so</p> <p>Monitor evolving wider business support landscape and lock into opportunities relevant to local businesses</p>
	Monitor emerging regional/national funding schemes.	Monitor emerging regional/national schemes, as they relate to need and priorities for the Borough.	Monitor and link into any emerging regional/ national schemes, as they relate to need and priorities. This will be through partners (Kickstart; UK Community Renewal Fund) or directly (Levelling up Fund)	Monitor and link into any emerging regional/national schemes, as they relate to need and priorities. This will be through partners (Kickstart; UK Community Renewal

			<p>Identify and develop priority projects with partners, in preparation for funding opportunities</p> <p>Respond to enquiries and influence decision making on SELP funding for Visitor Economy Business Support - focus on innovate and adaptation as a result of changing consumer demands due to pandemic</p> <p>Link into UK Community Renewal Fund bid led by Visit Kent - Working title 'The Last Mile' project to meet needs of rural businesses – feasibility study and pilot projects to provide support to rural business and rural communities through improved transport links. Partners include four priority area districts (Swale) and Community Rail Partnership, Arriva, Stagecoach and Southeastern</p>	<p>Fund) or directly (Levelling up Fund)</p> <p>Develop priority projects with partners, to be ready for funding bids, and deliver when possible.</p>
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	Develop Economic Improvement Plan (EIP) short term actions	Endorsement and adoption of the EIP	<p>Delivery of short-term EIP actions not identified elsewhere, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Refresh and enhance Swale Means Business to reach local SME's. -Promote local 'success stories' -Intelligence to monitor local economic change -work with partners to help access to skills and opportunity <p>Keep EIP medium term actions under review for relevance and make progress where possible</p>	<p>Progress medium term actions</p> <p>Review EIP in light of resources, delivery, local economic circumstances and Council priorities</p>
	Develop Visitor Economy Framework (VEF) quick wins	<p>Endorsement of the VEF</p> <p>Deliver VEF quick wins eg English Tourism Week 22 – 31 May Strapline 'Here for Tourism' timing revised to be after next key road map date of 17.5.2021</p> <p>Kent Big Weekend 26.6.2021 to 23.7.2021</p>	<p>Opening of Sheerness TIC during this period as well moving of Faversham VIC to move to 12 Market Place</p> <p>Campaign which is about keeping footfall going once out of planned lockdown so 26.6.2021 to 23.7.2021 – campaign will be social media channels and partner social media channels. Target audience will be Kent, Essex and East Sussex residents (as funded through SE LEP).</p>	

			<p>Visit Kent will extract information from destination website to establish a Top 10 (actual will be 15) key businesses that cannot offer free tickets but will be given ongoing promotion throughout Kent Big Weekend</p> <p>Visit Swale Website and social media messaging to follow Visit Kent and Visit England themes during the Covid 19 recovery. Following the introduction of Step 2 (12.4.2021) on the roadmap to recovery website updated to follow the national message “Escape the Everyday Responsibly” https://www.visit-swale.co.uk/</p> <p>Previous planning has had to be revised to fit in with the recovery – usual seasonal events and messaging will resume as we come out of the pandemic.</p>	
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		<p>Interreg Experience – developing walking and cycling offer</p>	<p>Develop three enhanced 'green routes' for walking and cycling - Wildlife and Heritage Trails linking Coast to Downs in Swale</p> <p>Increase number of businesses involved in Gourmet Garden Trails and Kent Food Trails</p> <p>England's Creative Coast – Art Home Pilot Programme; aimed at homeowners who let out rooms/house and in response to experiential holidays staying in people's homes (Air BnB and Homestay) this is an initiative where local artists open their homes as places for people to stay and current home-stay hosts work with artists in new ways and to provide visitors with a unique overnight stay as well as additional income stream for artists</p> <p>Gourmet Garden Trails to be relaunched following pandemic and will be incorporated into Escape the Everyday (latter funded by VB) digital campaign</p>	
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			<p>which will run from 17 May to 30 June 2021. Targets pre-nesters 'discovering and treating yourself'. This campaign is about building consumer confidence. Hero banner content to be used – 2 per sub-regional destination. Visit Swale/Visit Faversham already using promotional tag Escape the Everyday</p> <p>Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness; will focus on High Street recovery post pandemic and seek to support local trading through a 'Shop Local' promotion with businesses putting up £5 offers – Faversham Destination Marketing Group lead</p> <p>Curation of place-based support through new asset library and will be supported by place-based campaigns to develop consumer confidence, increase footfall and will support spend in destination</p>	
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	Deliver the Opening up the High Streets Project across Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Faversham	Continue the Opening up the High Streets Project across Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Faversham Implement Emergency and then Temporary Road Closures	Continue the Opening up the High Streets Project across Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Faversham as it merges into the WBF project (see below) Consultation on TTRO's and explore permanent TRO's	
		Explore the feasibility of a digital high streets approach	High Street Recovery Encourage people back to our high streets and coastal towns to spend money and enjoy leisure time - Deliver actions against criteria in the Welcome Back Fund (WBF) Implement a pilot digital high streets approach	Continue to deliver actions from the WBF project Sustained digital offer for high streets
		Develop the wider Sittingbourne High Street Project, Deliver initial public realm improvements in Sheerness and enhance capacity for future delivery	Develop Sittingbourne high street place making and strategic visioning through the developing SPD Develop and deliver public realm improvements through Capital Projects team	Develop and deliver public realm improvements through Capital Projects team

			<p>Work with Government High Street Task Force for Sittingbourne or Sheerness looking at high street recovery</p> <p>Determine the future approach to the High Streets for the longer-term</p>	
		<p>Look at the opportunity for business start-ups/ incubator space/ commuter provision</p>	<p>Deliver His Masters House project</p> <p>Deliver Swale House project rental space on 1st Floor</p> <p>Explore opportunities for delivery of small business space in Faversham</p>	<p>Deliver His Masters House project</p>
			<p>Secure external investment for economic and place recovery</p> <p>Bids to the Community Renewal Fund and Levelling Up Fund</p> <p>Deliver CRF project if successful</p>	<p>Develop projects that come out of the LUF proposals</p>
	<p>Continue to explore opportunities for improving</p>	<p>Participate in discussions with key stakeholders to seek a</p>	<p>Work with partners to take advantage of funding which can deliver better local</p>	<p>Work with partners to take advantage of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund</p>

	access to opportunities for learning and retraining.	consensus for developing improving future provision.	access for learning, and improved access to the labour market, both in the short and medium term inc. UK Community Renewal Fund.	(and other appropriate opportunities) to enhance access for local residents.
Affordable Housing	Insist on affordable housing as part of the planning process	Insist on affordable housing as part of the planning process	Insist on affordable housing as part of the planning process and review of the Local Plan Engage with Homes England Strategic Partners to maximise grant used in Swale.	Insist on affordable housing as part of the planning process Engage with Homes England Strategic Partners to maximise grant used in Swale.
	Deliver landlord tenancy sustainment work and prevention work	Review landlord tenancy sustainment work and prevention work	Adapt where necessary landlord tenancy sustainment work and prevention work Multi-agency group on Housing developed and focused on complex needs individual.	Multi-agency group to pilot projects and access external funding to focus on complex needs cohort.
	Deliver rough sleeping and hidden homeless project	Deliver Next Steps Accommodation Programme	Deliver Next Steps Accommodation Programme (Round 1) Explore further projects for subsequent rounds of RSAP (formerly NSAP) with Riverside Homes.	Review rough sleeping and hidden homeless projects. Develop long-term accommodation pathways for rough sleeper cohort.

			Implement RSI4 bid (July to March 2022) and review service in light of funding secured.	Develop bid for future rounds of RSI.
	Explore feasibility of establishing a Housing Company	Set up Housing Company	Housing Company established and operational Business Plan agreed Development Management consultant appointed	Sites start to be developed out
Climate and environmental emergency	Deliver the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan	Deliver the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan	Deliver the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan	Deliver the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan
	Developing plans for Swale House refurbishment	Determining what is feasible for Swale House refurbishment	Refurbishment carried out	Additional works if funding becomes available, recalculation of offsetting needs
	Clean Air Zone	Consultants commissioned to develop a proposal	Implementation subject to KCC	Monitoring and evaluation
	Green staff travel plan	Mileage reduced due to COVID	Review once new ways of working established as a result of COVID	
	Work with Children and Families Ltd to recruit a Fuel and Water project worker	Implement work programme for the Fuel and Water project worker to help residents who may be struggling financially and are in fuel poverty.	Review work programme for the Fuel and Water project worker to help residents who may be struggling financially and are in fuel poverty.	Consider funding for a third year
	Park/ Open Space Improvement projects to	Park/ Open Space Improvement projects to	Park/ Open Space Improvement projects to	

	encourage greater activity and access to green space and the health and wellbeing outcomes that brings	encourage greater activity and access to green space and the health and wellbeing outcomes that brings	encourage greater activity and access to green space and the health and wellbeing outcomes that brings	
	Active Travel Project tranche 1	Interreg Experience – developing walking and cycling offer	Agree the Transport Strategy through the Local Plan	
Communities and Social Inclusion	Develop a health and wellbeing recovery plan	Endorse a health and wellbeing recovery plan	Implement health and wellbeing recovery plan Represent Swale in the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) transformation programme/ population health management Engage with KCC Reconnect Children & Young People project	Review health and wellbeing recovery plan Actively engage in the ICP Delivery Plan
	Deliver community support hub	Review support and reinstate community support hub in event of a local lockdown	Managed withdrawal from community support hub	
			Implement focused community development programme in identified deprived communities.	Continue to deliver community development programme. Review and evaluate findings. (Legacy plan is part of the programme – but only funded short-term)

			Work in partnership to tackle mental health and improve the scope of such services, through Social Prescribing model	Integrate Social Prescribing model in Swale in partnership with KCC and ICP/CCG
			Run small community engagement events in local areas as per govt guidance - Link to the welcome back fund	Develop grant scheme and event guidance for jubilee events.
			Create a Hardship Recovery Group to identify those most impacted by COVID and develop projects and initiatives to provide support	Continue Hardship recovery group, monitor key indicators and evaluate outcomes. Deliver targeted interventions
	Work with Swale foodbanks to ensure a coordinated effort of support	Work with Swale foodbanks to ensure a coordinated effort of support	Work with Swale foodbanks to ensure a coordinated effort of support	
	Grant support and work with Swale CVS, CAB, to support communities	Grant support and work with Swale CVS, CAB, to support communities	Grant support and work with Swale CVS, CAB, to support communities	Carry on funding
	Run the member community grant scheme	Run the member community grant scheme	Run the member community grant scheme Review wider community grant schemes and implement new schemes.	Carry on grant schemes

	Developing an ongoing volunteer scheme building on those who helped with community hub	Developing an ongoing volunteer scheme building on those who helped with community hub Implement the scheme	Implement the scheme ??	
	Deliver work programme of the Community Engagement and Social Inclusion Officer and the Health and Wellbeing Officer	Deliver work programme of the Community Engagement and Social Inclusion Officer and the Health and Wellbeing Officer	Review work programme of the Community Engagement and Social Inclusion Officer and the Health and Wellbeing Officer	
	Develop an approach to the Emergency Assistance programme and allocate funding	Deliver the Winter Grants programme	Self isolation support delivered	
	Contribute to the development of the Kent Local Lockdown Plan	Support the Public Health Local Lockdown Plan and utilise the £50k grant and £90k MHCLG Track & Trace work	Implement Door knocking as part of track and trace	
		Administer self-isolation payments		
		Develop COVID Contain Fund Plan and deliver targeted interventions regarding compliance	Continue to deliver against the Contain Fund plan	
Renewing local democracy and making	Introduce Area Committees	Evolution of Area Committees	Area Committees established and sustained	

the council fit for the future				
	Planning the introduction of Cabinet Committees	Planning the introduction of Cabinet Committees	<p>Cabinet advisory committees to be introduced as forerunner of full committee system.</p> <p>Determine whether to move to full committee system. Undertake necessary work to rewrite the constitution.</p>	If agreed, full committee system from May 2022.
	Redesign and risk assess Swale House to comply with Govt guidance for safely getting people back to the office. Determine process of getting staff back in phases	Continue phased return of staff (put on hold due to second lockdown)	<p>New ways of working Steering group to develop proposals on how council staff and services will work post COVID.</p> <p>Review front line/ customer facing services and receptions</p>	Embed homeworking/ flexible working within the culture of the Council in the longer term.
	Explore the use of technology and digital for home working and holding virtual meetings		<p>Explore the use of technology and digital for home working and holding virtual meetings.</p> <p>Consider the role of hybrid meetings for Council meetings</p>	In the event that new legislation on remote meetings is forthcoming, consider pros and cons of remote/ hybrid meetings in longer term.