

BUSINESS RATES RETENTION PILOT PROJECTS

	£000
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Total	<hr/> 640 <hr/>

Housing First and Rough Sleepers

Background

Maidstone has traditionally had an active street population which includes both rough sleepers and beggars. Our annual street count in 2017 was 41, which was a rise of 17% on the previous year 2016, and is slightly above the national average of 15%. This figure represents the largest cohort across the districts in Kent.

The current support model within Maidstone is fair but can be limited by minimal effective options for these complex individuals. We need to create an environment of change and challenge the current situation.

Project Objectives

- 1. Deep dive into the reasons and experiences why people are living on the streets in Maidstone**, including looking at the barriers to moving away from the lifestyle and what creates a positive outcome for those chronically excluded. We aim to use the model created by World Habitat European Campaign to End Street Homelessness which is based on engaging the community in resolution of the issues. To date six UK local authorities have undertaken this piece of work including Westminster, Brighton and Torbay.
- 2. Development of a Housing First model within Maidstone in partnership with Porchlight.** Housing First (HF) is an evidence- based approach to supporting homeless people with high needs and complex issues to live in their own homes. The overall philosophy of Housing First is to provide a stable, independent home and intensive personalised support and case management to homeless people with multiple and complex needs. This in turn brings positive outcomes including a reduction on the cost to the public purse in terms of community safety

We would look to rent seven flats for initially a period of 12 months.
- 3. Creation of a Challenge Group Partnership.** This will be a group whose membership will be compiled of influencers and budget holders across our organisation and key stakeholders including the Community Safety, Police, Treatment services, Social Care and Health services. The meeting will be chaired by John Littlemore and will work through this pilot looking to challenge the status quo of those most high profile and problematic of the street population including beggars. We would hope to use both a supportive and enforcement approach which is flexible and can respond to the individual issues of those on the agenda.

Regeneration Opportunity Areas**Background**

The Council's Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan proposes a project focused on key regeneration opportunity areas. Five sites/areas in the town centre have been identified and recommended where it is recommended this project focuses. The selected sites are all considered to have genuine (re)development potential, capable of generating a significant regenerative boost for the town centre. This builds on studies prepared to support the council's Economic Development function and for the evidence base of the Local Plan. Conventionally, the redevelopment of brownfield sites is more difficult to deliver as they are less attractive for developers. There is a potential role for the council in promoting these brownfield opportunities, setting out clear information on what could be achieved on each site (and signalling what the council would welcome), providing practical information on matters such as the location and capacity of utilities thereby helping to reduce risk for developers and investors with the result that investment in Maidstone becomes more appealing. This would be further demonstration of the Council taking a pro-active approach to redevelopment in the town centre, including tackling some 'eyesore' sites.

Project Objectives

The outputs of the project will be a Maidstone Town Centre Opportunity Areas Brochure, and other associated collateral, which will promote investment in the town centre for residential-led mixed use schemes, which will be able to be used in a marketing campaign and which can be used in site-specific negotiations. The brochure will be pivotal in engaging with developers and promoting investment in the town centre more widely. The promotional material will be underpinned with site-specific planning guidance capable of being used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Ultimately the objective is to bring forward housing for development in the town centre broad locations (and other windfall sites) set out in the Local Plan. It is also for MBC to show vision and leadership in respect of a number of difficult sites that have proved difficult to deliver over years past.

Property Asset Review**Background**

The Property Investment Strategy forms part of the 2018 Capital Strategy and a key recommendation of that Strategy is for the existing Council Property Portfolio to be reviewed in line with asset management best practice.

The previous Asset Management Plan was completed in 2012 and although it recommended a review of a number of key assets, it was not a comprehensive review of the entire portfolio.

A Property Asset Review will ensure that the Council's property assets can respond to the Council's corporate priorities and more specifically will identify opportunities for the Council to optimise income or capital from Council owned property and to ensure that all Council services are provided through facilities which are fit for purpose and utilised effectively.

Project Objectives

The Property Asset Review is the first essential step of any effective Property Strategy. The Review will provide the basis for future recommendations of the Capital Strategy and Property Investment Strategy and result in key actions for how to produce additional capital and revenue from the existing portfolio.

The Review will include:

- Overview of the existing property portfolio as a whole rather than considering properties in isolation.
- Consideration of how property assets are currently used and why they are held
- If any increase in the benefit received could be achieved
- Any opportunities for increased revenue generation
- How properties could be more efficiently and effectively used/occupied

Upon completion the Review will ensure the Council are clear about the extent, value, condition and suitability of its property portfolio and thus will enable the Council to make strategic property decisions going forward.

Members' Community Grant**Background**

In order to assist with community development and cultural cohesion, a one off community development fund will be created. The rationale is that local councillors, as ward representatives, know their communities and their local (micro) needs.

Creating a series of ward funds based on £1,000 a councillor will provide the means to help local community groups and organisations with one off pump priming money. Some of the money could be allocated to small environmental improvements.

Examples of how the funding could be used include:

- one-off support for local voluntary groups to enable them to become more sustainable, e.g. purchase of computer equipment
- purchase or repair of public realm equipment or furniture, e.g. park benches
- contribution to the cost of non-political local events and activities that are consistent with the Council's values
- sports or health & well-being projects.

Project Objectives

The Community Fund will support local initiatives which:

- contribute to delivery of the Council's priorities
- are sustainable and do not create additional pressures on the Council's resources
- there is a tangible benefit to residents within the area represented by the councillor
- funding is not readily available from other sources
- expenditure is in accordance with the Council's constitution and the overall local authority legal framework.

Preference will be given to projects where funding is matched from other sources.

The administration of the fund will be kept as simple as possible, consistent with the requirements of good governance. This should ensure minimal overheads for operating the fund and the cost of these are estimated as being £5,000. Guidelines for use of the funds will be prepared to ensure that the projects meet the criteria set out above and that expenditure meets all the normal legal and constitutional requirements for Council expenditure. Details of all money spent will be published on the Council's website.

The Fund will be established on a one-off basis in 2018/19. Any unused money may be carried forward at the end of the year, but there is no further funding available at this stage to top up the Fund in 2019/20.

Predictive analytics and preventing homelessness**Background**

Statutory homelessness is up 44% since 2010 and rough sleeping has more than doubled since this date. In April 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act will be effective which places a greater emphasis and duties on Local Housing Authorities to prevent homelessness. Local Authorities will be legally obliged to provide more meaningful assistance to all people who are eligible and homeless or threatened with homelessness, irrespective of their priority need status. Local Authorities will have a duty to prevent the threat of homelessness, for any person who is in threat within 56 days.

Under the new statute Local Authorities are also required to ensure services are designed to meet the needs of particular groups who have been identified of being at increased risk of becoming homeless.

From October 2018 there will also be the duty on specified public bodies to refer, with client consent, any person homeless or in threat of being homeless.

This project would be identify at the earliest possible stage those persons at risk of future homelessness and provide early intervention and support. This early intervention cannot be met by the homelessness prevention activities being undertaken by the Housing Advice Team, as the focus will be on the statutory duties of to assist those persons in threat or homelessness within 56 days, or who are already in a homeless situation.

Project Objectives

- Develop a predictive model using local and national datasets to identify individuals with the key risk factors associated with future homelessness. By using predictive analytics to analyse various datasets held by the Council and other stakeholders, such as homelessness, housing benefits, council tax, anti-social behaviour, looked after children and children-in-need, we can link data to give a richer picture of people who are homeless or at risk of it.
- Develop a pathway to provide a smooth route into accessing housing support for the service users identified as at risk of future homelessness will be established. Service users will be triaged to the appropriate pathway i.e. housing support only or wider wraparound support.
- Promote a new approach, linking to the Homelessness Prevention Act, which will enable early housing and support intervention to be put in place, before any risk of homelessness develops.

Housing Delivery Partnership

Background

As described in a workshop to Members in December 2017, delivered by the Director of Regeneration and Place and Trowers & Hamlins, there is a potential business case to forming a joint venture (a Housing Delivery Partnership in the form of an LLP) with a housing association and / or an institutional investor, to acquire S106 affordable housing from developers in the borough. The project would require capital investment from MBC to be funded from within the Capital Programme.

To achieve the project objectives an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance would need to be commissioned and introduced. Considerable legal advice and procurement work would also be needed to develop the business case and to identify the right partner.

Project Objectives

- Simplified delivery of affordable housing.
- Improved local lettings and management arrangements.
- Improved affordability to the end user by controlling the transfer price payable to the developer.

Community Environmental Engagement Initiative**Background**

Conserving and promoting biodiversity in the Borough is a key objective for the Council as set out in the Local Plan and the Parks and Open Spaces 10 year Plan. In order to deliver this it is essential to engage with residents, communities and key stakeholders and promote the environmental initiatives – both big and small – which take place across the Borough. The intention is to gain community momentum to drive forward new projects and make a cultural shift towards positive environmental improvement including reducing littering and fly tipping which can impact the appearance and quality of the environment.

Whilst many individual initiatives take place within the Borough, a more coordinated approach which generates connections between individuals and communities will deliver more significant impacts towards the Council's objective of Maidstone being an attractive environment which residents and visitors can enjoy.

The Council also has a significant amount of Section 106 funding to support improvements to publicly accessible open space. Whilst the Parks and Open Spaces 10 year Plan intends to create a more cohesive approach to the delivery of this, there is a greater need to connect the public with green spaces, whether they are Council parks, their own gardens or local nature reserves. This initiative looks to bridge this gap by engaging the public with the environment and generate pride in our Borough.

Project Objectives

The project centres on the creation of a website (or micro-site part of MBC website) which enables residents, community groups, partner organisations and Maidstone Borough Council to populate with environmental based projects.

The objectives of the project are:

- to deliver a website which captures the initiatives currently being undertaken across the Borough from the installation of bird or bat boxes to the creation of green corridors
- to raise awareness of local initiatives residents can be involved with
- to provide support and tools to facilitate new projects e.g. workshops / information material on building ponds
- to create a culture focused with respecting our environment and identifying opportunities to conserve it wherever possible
- to reduce waste crime including littering and fly tipping through increased civic pride and respect for environment
- to create community connections and reduce social isolation

Maidstone Business capital of Kent – marketing initiative**Background**

With a newly adopted Local Plan, a local economy that is continuing to grow, and many exciting projects coming to fruition, this is the right time to demonstrate that Maidstone is 'open for business'. In order to promote Maidstone as the Business Capital of Kent and drive inward investment, the Council will run a positive PR campaign to raise the profile of Maidstone, and develop marketing collateral in the form of an interactive Town Centre map, a marketing toolkit and a microsite for inward investment.

Project Objectives

- Promote the advantages of the Borough as a place to invest, work, live and visit
- Dispel any negative perceptions arising from previous planning decisions, congestion and lack of suitable employment space
- Demonstrate that Maidstone is truly 'open for business'.

The project will comprise three areas of work, to be commissioned from a suitably qualified and experienced marketing / PR company:

- A positive PR campaign to raise the profile of Maidstone as a great place to invest, work, live and visit.
- Development of marketing collateral
- Inward investment marketing campaign

The third area is funded separately but is treated as part of the overall project.

The deliverables from the project will be:

- A planned and agreed PR campaign.
- Evidence of PR activity undertaken across all media and channels.
- An interactive web based digital map of the town centre showing key developments to date and future developments and opportunity areas.
- A marketing toolkit which will be available to all stakeholders.
- An inward investment micro site on the back of www.businessinmaidstone.co.uk
- A planned and agreed inward investment strategy and marketing campaign across all media channels.
- Evidence to demonstrate the raising of Maidstone's profile as a business location.
- A marketing brochure for the Maidstone town centre 'High Five'.
- A successful social media campaign.

Staplehurst Village Centre Masterplan

Background

The Staplehurst Neighbourhood Plan, supported by ward members, sets out an aspiration to regenerate the land around the train station to improve the quality and quantity of car parking provision, as well as to provide a mixed use development, to include retail so as to create a more vibrant village centre.

Project Objectives

To generate clarity and leadership, so that private and public sector land owners in the locality will work collaboratively so as to bring forward development that meets the aspirations of the local community. So the work will involve;

- An audit of local land ownerships.
- Pre-planning advice.
- The production of a masterplan that meets the aspirations of the local community.
- A business case for the proposed development.

Maidstone Housing Design Guide

Background

Given the housing growth in the borough, there is a need to raise the design standard of new housing be built in the borough. This guide would become a material planning consideration or Supplementary Planning Guidance, and help us succinctly set out our aspirations in terms of quality. It would take the form of a useful visual checklist approach rather than an all-encompassing lengthy written document, i.e. it would be more of a mood board type approach, palettes of materials and design cues, approaches to street scene, greening / bio diversity. It could also be flexed to work across the differ localities of the borough.

Project Objectives

To raise the design quality of new housing built in the borough over the medium to long term.

Benefits would include improved engagement and streamlining of the planning process, particularly through PPAs, so reducing abortive work from both developers and planning staff alike. I.e. we would be better able to articulate our design aspirations for the borough rather than negatively responding to what we don't like.

Install more Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points around the borough

Background

The Council recently adopted its Low Emission Strategy which has a detailed action plan appended to it. One of the actions is as per the above, especially on Council owned sites, and our car park portfolio in particular. This direction of travel was also signalled within the Council's Parking Innovation Strategy that was adopted by the Strategic Planning Sustainability & Transportation Committee (SPS&T) in Feb 2018.

In terms of the SPS&T decision, there will be sixteen such charging points in total installed in across eight car parks anyway, funded through Civil Parking Enforcement Fund (at a cost of around £20k).

The proposal therefore is, subject to usage of those first installations, to double the amount of new charging points to 32 at a cost of around £20k from the Business Rates Retention Pilot Fund. Should the take up be discouraging, the £20k would then instead be spent on other items listed in the action plan of the low emission strategy in consultation with the Chairman of SPS&T.

In terms of the parking portfolio, this would mean giving over an amount of spaces to purely EV's.

Project Objectives

- To improve air quality within Maidstone by encouraging the take of EV's.

Bus Station Improvement – feasibility study

Background

The work undertaken in the recent tri-study shows that there is a need for a bus station in Maidstone, and the current facility is the best location for it, but it is in drastic need of refurbishment.

The likely cost of refurbishment is £2.5. It is likely that three partners would contribute to the cost: MBC, Capital & Regional and Arriva. Other funding could come from grant funding available from the LEP for countywide transport infrastructure improvements.

In order to attract this grant funding, possibly by way of transferring it from other stalled transport projects that were earmarked for Maidstone, it is necessary to have a worked up and costed design and supporting narrative.

This work could be incorporated into a second iteration of the Maidstone Integrated Transport package.

Project Objectives

To improve public transport amenities and infrastructure within the borough.

Data Analytics for Inclusive Growth**Background**

The data underpinning Council policies has a critical influence on how those policies developed. To take some obvious examples:

- data about number of households drives the Local Plan
- Council Tax income assumptions shape our Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Currently, much of the data we use is financial and/or biased towards what is relatively easy to measure – eg population, number of households. Less tangible data, which is potentially more difficult to gather, tends to be overlooked. This means, for example, that in developing the Local Plan, there is a strong emphasis on the quantitative (number of homes) at the expense of the qualitative.

The Council needs to look beyond the obvious measures, so that the factors such as the following are properly considered:

- Quality of infrastructure
- Travel patterns
- People's skills and employability
- Incidence of deprivation
- Health
- Environmental sustainability.

This project would review the relevant information that is available. It would define a broader set of metrics, based on the available data, and would establish processes for extracting and presenting this data on a regular basis.

Project Objectives

- Obtain a better understanding of the data sets available to the Council in developing policy.
- Develop a wider set of metrics, enabling a more inclusive understanding of the factors shaping policy development.
- Establish processes for compiling measurement data such that it can be updated on a regular basis and used by the Council on a day-to-day basis.