KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 3 August 2026.

PRESENT: Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair), Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair), Mr M Harrison (Substitute for Mr J Eustace), Mr A J Hook, Mr S Jeffery (Substitute for Mr M A J Hood), Mrs M Lawes (Substitute for Mr D Truder), Mr T Mallon, Mr T Mole, Mr M Paul (Substitute for Mr J Defriend), Mr H Rayner (Substitute for Mrs S Hudson), Mr T L Shonk, Dr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr M Reidy and Mrs R Swansbury (Substitute for Mr Q Roper)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins, Mrs B Fordham, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr P Osborne, Mr R Palmer, Mr P Webb, Mr D Wimble and Mr R Yates

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Arnold (Corporate Director Finance), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer), Ms H Gillivan (Director for Adults and Integrated Commissioning), Mr A Jeffery (Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Ms L Smith (Flood and Water Manager), Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny)), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive) and Ms H Woodland (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

60. Apologies and Substitutes
(Item A1)

Apologies were received from Mr Eustace, for whom Mr Harrison was substituting, Mr Truder for whom Mrs Lawes was substituting, Mr Defriend for whom Mr Paul was substituting, Mr Hood for whom Mr Jeffery was substituting, Mrs Hudson for whom Mr Rayner was substituting, Mr Roper for whom Mr Swansbury was substituting and the Parent Governor Representatives.

61. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting
(Item A2)

There were no declarations of interest.

62. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2026
(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2026 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chair.

63. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn 2025-26
(Item C1)

1. The item was introduced by Brian Collins, Deputy Leader, who presented the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report Outturn 2025-26 and highlighted that the report related to the first full financial year under the current administration.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

   a) Mr Collins advised that Adult Social Care (ASC) continued to represent one of the most significant financial pressures facing local authorities nationally. He explained that work was ongoing to strengthen financial management arrangements and manage increasing demand pressures. Whilst no guarantees could be given regarding future overspends, every effort was being made to minimise the requirement to draw on reserves.

   b) Mr Collins explained that the ASC overspend reflected a combination of factors, including increasing demand, procurement challenges and the non-delivery of planned savings. He highlighted that the level of overspend had reduced during the latter part of the financial year.

   c) Mr Collins stated that the General Fund reserve stood at 4.31% at the end of 2025-26 and was forecast to increase to 6.37% during the current financial year. He explained that the Council continued to work towards maintaining reserves within the recommended range of 5-10%.

   d) Mr Collins advised that Delivery of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) activity had become embedded across the Council and expressed confidence that this work would contribute to future savings and improved financial performance.

   e) The Chair reminded Members that questions should relate to the report and that political debate would be addressed separately.

   f) Mr Collins expressed confidence in Council officers and the relevant teams and stressed that the forecasts had been prepared under the previous administration. He also highlighted the appointment of the new Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health and referred to the ongoing work being undertaken to minimise avoidable suffering for residents.

   g) Mr Collins highlighted the administration’s achievement in reducing the Council’s debt through measures such as early repayments, resulting in annual revenue budget savings of approximately £1.3 million per year.

   h) Mr Collins expressed that there would be no benefit in reinstating the Treasury Management Group, citing its previous lack of results when arrangements allowed for Member participation.

   i) Brendan Arnold, Corporate Director of Finance, advised that the Council had submitted the required Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Reform Plan to the Department for Education (DfE) and continued to work closely with Government advisers. He indicated that there was no reason to believe Kent would be less successful than other authorities participating in the process and that a decision was anticipated later in the year. He added that SEND pressures continued to be experienced nationally and that Kent continued to work with Government and partners to manage the associated financial risks.

j) Mr Collins highlighted the difficulty in predicting future overspends, stating that significant financial pressures remained within ASC and Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) services and that budget movements between financial years could occur.

k) Mr Collins highlighted that significant emphasis was being placed on the delivery of capital projects, with regular meetings held to oversee progress and the Council’s infrastructure and property programmes.

l) In response to a question regarding Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) loans, Mr Collins advised that no decision had been made regarding the repayment of the loans and that any such matters would be considered through the Council’s normal treasury management procedures.

m) Mr Collins highlighted that the position remained uncertain and subject to ongoing developments in relation to LGR, making it difficult to take definitive decisions regarding future capital expenditure at this stage.

n) Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, explained that rising costs associated with independent specialist placements reflected increasing levels of demand and national pressures. She outlined work undertaken to expand specialist provision, increase capacity within maintained schools and reduce reliance on higher-cost independent placements over time.

o) Ben Watts, Deputy Chief Executive, suggested that a number of matters raised during the discussion be taken away for consideration through the agenda setting process and addressed in a future report.

3. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

a) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the ongoing pressures within ASC and the impact that any future overspends may have on the Council's reserves position. The Member recommended further reporting to support monitoring and contingency planning.

b) A Member suggested a report be produced identifying capital projects should continue and which may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

c) A Member expressed concern that the assumptions underpinning the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) did not adequately reflect the Council's recent history of overspending and highlighted ongoing financial pressures within CYPE and the High Needs Block.

d) A Member suggested that future budget monitoring reports include clearer information regarding the impact of DOLGE activity to support effective scrutiny.

e) Mr Watts advised that identifying and reporting the specific financial impact of DOLGE activity could be challenging due to its cross-cutting nature but confirmed that officers would consider how best to reflect this in future reporting. It was confirmed a separate meeting would take place in order to identify how the matter could be best addressed.

f) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the deliverability of certain savings proposals within the 2026/27 budget, commenting that some budget lines did not appear to be fully costed and could increase the risk of future overspends. The Member requested that the September Q1 report include an update on the delivery of those savings and that their implementation continue to be monitored.

g) A Member highlighted concerns regarding the level of underspend within the capital programme and suggested that the Committee receive quarterly updates on capital spending to monitor progress and understand the reasons for non-delivery.

h) A Member thanked officers and the Deputy Leader for the report and commented that it provided reassurance regarding the Council's financial position during the period under review.

i) A Member highlighted the potential impact of delays to capital expenditure programmes, particularly in relation to building projects, and suggested that the administration set out the measures being taken to ensure approved capital budgets are delivered in a timely manner so as to maintain value for money.

j) A Member emphasised the importance of continued scrutiny of reserves, underspends and unrealised efficiency savings.

4. The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member to provide clarification on comments made during the debate. This included the following:

   a) Mr Collins clarified that he could not guarantee that overspends would not occur, particularly given the pressures within ASC and CYPE, but highlighted that he would continue working with officers to deliver the Council's financial objectives.

5. The Chair summarised the discussion and highlighted the importance of timely scrutiny of financial monitoring reports. He also emphasised the need to improve demand forecasting and understanding of future pressures, particularly in ASC and SEND, to support effective long-term financial planning. The Chair proposed to note the report and make the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

a) That further contingency planning in relation to Adult Social Care pressures be undertaken and reported to either the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee or the Scrutiny Committee.

b) That the September Q1 report include updates on the delivery of savings.

c) A paper be produced identifying the capital projects that must continue and those that may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

6. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report and make the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member:

a) That further contingency planning in relation to Adult Social Care pressures be undertaken and reported to either the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee or the Scrutiny Committee.

b) That the September Q1 report include updates on the delivery of savings.

c) A paper be produced identifying the capital projects that must continue and those that may no longer be progressed, including those affected by LGR and any other factors impacting delivery.

64. SFI Executive Response
(Item C2)

1. The item was introduced by Mr Collins and Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health, who presented the Executive Response to the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry. Members were advised that all recommendations contained within the Inquiry report had been accepted and that work was progressing with relevant partners to support implementation.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

    a) Mr Henderson reported that a number of the previously agreed actions had now been completed, with progress updates set out in the report. He highlighted the inaugural Kent Water Resilience meeting scheduled for 8 October, as well as recent engagement between the Leader and John Halsall, the newly announced Chief Executive Officer of South East Water. Mr Henderson welcomed positive collaboration between Thanet Earth and the Environment Agency, confirming that licenses had been granted for further water extraction and outlining that this partnership approach was being encouraged through the Council’s correspondence with relevant organisations.

b) Mr Watts advised that future monitoring of the recommendations could be undertaken through the Flood Risk and Water Management Committee, with matters returning to Scrutiny Committee where appropriate.

c) The Leader of the Council advised that she had recently met with the Chief Executive of South East Water and had raised concerns regarding the company's lack of statutory consultee status in relation to housing developments. She assured the Committee that the potential for KCC to have greater input into the planning application process remained under consideration and that discussions on possible next steps were ongoing.

d) Mr Watts acknowledged that progress updates would continue to be reported through the appropriate channels and indicated that a further report to the Committee was likely in due course. He also advised that officers would consider the suggestions made regarding KCC's role in the planning process, including any statutory or other constraints on what the authority could and could not do.

3. Following the questions, the Chair welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

a) A Member highlighted the importance of ensuring that the work undertaken through the Inquiry continued to progress and was not adversely affected by future LGR arrangements, including through collaboration with other relevant groups where appropriate.

b) A Member suggested that future progress reports include indicative target dates for implementation, where appropriate, to assist ongoing scrutiny and accountability.

c) A Member raised that KCC could play a strategic role in bringing together local planning authorities in water- stressed areas to make coordinated representations to Government on challenges of meeting housing targets where water infrastructure capacity is strained.

d) A Member reiterated the absence of timescales within the report and suggested that these be included to assist with monitoring progress. They further suggested a more comprehensive update report be brought back to the Committee in six months' time to enable further scrutiny of the progress against the actions identified.

e) A Member highlighted concerns about insufficient investment in water infrastructure and requested that the Water Resilience Partnership continue to encourage water companies to invest in and maintain their assets to improve resilience.

4. The Chair welcomed the positive response from the Executive and thanked Members, officers and stakeholders who had contributed to the Inquiry. The Chair proposed to note the Executive response to the recommendations made by the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Executive Response to the recommendations made by the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry.

65. Leader's Report - one year on
(Item C3)

1. The item was introduced by Linden Kemkaran, Leader of the Council, who presented a report outlining the challenges and progress made during the administration's first year in office. The report covered the Council's financial position, Adult Social Care, SEND, water resilience and highways, together with preparations for LGR.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:

    a) The Leader advised that a key priority for the remainder of the administration was to ensure that the authority was handed over in the strongest possible position ahead of LGR, whilst continuing to maintain service delivery and financial stability.

    b) The Leader explained that she had prioritised work on the Council's finances and operations since taking office, rather than attending Scrutiny Committee meetings, and stated that this reflected a different leadership approach from previous administrations rather than an evasion of scrutiny. She added that she had confidence in her Cabinet Member to attend and respond on portfolio matters, citing regular communication across the administration.

    c) The Chair encouraged Members to maintain a balanced and constructive debate and reminded them to keep their questions relevant to the report and directed to those present and able to respond.

    d) The Leader expressed the view that the Council had inherited significant financial and service pressures from the previous administration, including high levels of debt and pressures with ASC, and outlined actions taken by the current administration to address these issues and improve performance.

    e) Christopher Hespe, Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation, reiterated that the Council had inherited significant financial challenges, including high levels of debt, budget overspends, savings targets and contractual issues. He also stated that the DOLGE programme had helped to mitigate financial pressures, deliver savings and support a culture of value for money and organisational improvement across the Council.

    f) Mr Hespe clarified that the £14 million figure referenced in the report represented one element of a wider programme of savings achieved during the year and indicated that a breakdown of the figure could be provided separately if required. Mr Collins added that the figure represented the reduction between the Q3 forecast overspend and the year- end return.

g) The Leader confirmed that the administration intended to submit an Expression of Interest to become a Foundational Strategic Authority, following central Government's confirmation of its preferred devolution option for Kent.

h) Mr Collins provided context regarding the reported overspend figures, indicating that comparisons should be considered in light of the previous administration's forecast position and the year-end outturn reported.

i) Helen Gillivan, Director of Adults and Integrated Commissioning, advised that risk matrixes were now in place for individual contracts and that lessons learned from a national provider failure and the subsequent audit had informed improvements to the Council's approach to assessing and managing provider risk.

j) Mr Watts acknowledged that performance against certain audit metrics had declined over the period referenced, recognising that performance could vary over time and should be considered within the context of the Council's wider operating environment.

k) The Leader confirmed that she was satisfied that sufficient contingency was in place to support delivery of future savings.

l) In response to a question regarding IVF services, the Leader stated that the matter required further consideration and that a response would be provided outside the meeting.

m) Mr Collins stated that, whilst the administration recognised the value of capital projects funded through borrowing, its concerns related to the overall level of debt inherited and the absence of a long-term strategy for its repayment.

n) The Leader stated that addressing the Council's financial position had been her initial priority since taking office and advised that, although water supply was not a County Council function, she had established the Kent Water Resilience Partnership to bring relevant organisations together and address water resilience issues in Kent.

o) Mrs Fordham advised that work was underway to streamline Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment processes and improve timelines and confirmed that reducing waiting times for assessments formed part of the Council's Key Performance Indications (KPIs).

p) The Leader stated that the administration took motions agreed by the Council seriously and acknowledged that, although Entry/Exit System (EES) was not a function of the County Council, the Council recognised its implications for Kent residents and was committed to responding to those impacts as appropriate. Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, further advised that a meeting with partner organisations regarding the EES was scheduled for the following day and highlighted the recent announcement of £20 million in Levelling Up Fund funding to support further improvements in Dover.

q) The Leader expressed concern about public awareness of LGR, encouraged residents to engage with available information and consultation processes, and highlighted concerns regarding the pace of implementation and the model selected by central Government for Kent.

r) The Leader advised that the impact of LGR made it difficult to assess longer-term objectives, including whether the Council would achieve its stated objective of limiting organisational growth under the DOLGE programme.

s) The Leader emphasised the potential financial risks associated with implementing LGR, stating that Government announced to support the transition was significantly below estimated costs. She explained that there remained uncertainty regarding how those costs would be met and the financial sustainability for the proposed unitary authorities.

3. Following the questions, the Chair welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:

   a) A Member commented that the report and responses had focused primarily on activity rather than outcomes and emphasised the importance of demonstrating improvements in outcomes for residents, particularly in relation to SEND assessment times.

   b) A Member also expressed disappointment that a previous question regarding the publication of an action plan in relation to EES had not been directly addressed and sought clarification on the timescale for its publication.

   c) A Member relayed criticisms regarding LGR and the introduction of elected mayors, particularly in relation to planning powers and the potential impacts on local communities in Kent.

   d) A Member raised concerns that certain statements contained within the report had not been sufficiently substantiated, including figures surrounding DOLGE savings and water resilience.

   e) A Member expressed the view that future reports would benefit from a greater focus on factual information and measurable outcomes, supported by relevant performance data and audit findings, to assist Members in undertaking effective scrutiny.

   f) A Member thanked the Leader for the report and comments that future outcomes could not always be predicted with certainty and should be considered accordingly.

   g) A Member questioned whether, if LGR was considered likely to have significant negative consequences, the Council should take a similar position to that adopted by some other authorities and challenge its implementation.

h) A Member commented that the discussion had provided clarification that the Council's borrowing was linked the capital investment projects and highlighted that the repayment of certain loans had been undertaken through officer decisions and in accordance with the Council's Treasury Management policies. In response, Mr Collins clarified that he had been consulted on loan repayment decisions and that they had not been made solely by officers.

i) A Member argued that the report did not provide a comprehensive overview of Council activity, citing the omission of matters relating to Public Health, public transport, schools and aspects of Adult Social Care. It was clarified that the scope of the report had been agreed in advance to focus on a number of key strategic areas.

4. The Chair welcomed the Leader to provide clarification on comments made during the debate. This included the following:

   a) The Leader thanked the Committee for the opportunity to attend and outlined that matters relating to LGR and Devolution, SEND delays and EES were more appropriately considered by the relevant Cabinet Committees.

   b) The Leader stated that she considered the report to be an accurate reflection of the key areas requested by the Committee and advised that the content of future reports could be shaped by Members' requirements.

5. The Chair summarised the debate, thanked the Leader for her attendance and stated the importance of balancing strategic oversight with detailed scrutiny. He highlighted the significant challenges facing the Council, including LGR, Adult Social Care and SEND, and encouraged continued cross- party collaboration on matters of long- term significance to Kent. The Chair proposed to note the report and this was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

66. Work Programme
(Item D1)

1. It was agreed that LGR related matters would initially be considered by the relevant Cabinet Committee and could subsequently be brought to Scrutiny if considered appropriate.

2. The Chair advised that requests for scrutiny on the decision to cease accepting refrigerators and freezers at Household Waste Recycling Centres would be more appropriately considered through the relevant Committee or agenda setting process.

3. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Work Programme.