

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 11 December 2014.

PRESENT:

Mr P J Homewood (Chairman)
Mr M J Harrison (Vice-Chairman)

Mrs A D Allen, MBE, Mr M J Angell, Mr M Baldock, Mr M A C Balfour, Mr R H Bird, Mr H Birkby, Mr N J Bond, Mr A H T Bowles, Mr D L Brazier, Mrs P Brivio, Mr R E Brookbank, Mr L Burgess, Mr C W Caller, Miss S J Carey, Mr P B Carter, CBE, Mr N J D Chard, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr B E Clark, Mrs P T Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mr G Cowan, Mrs M E Crabtree, Ms C J Cribbon, Mr A D Crowther, Mrs V J Dagger, Mr D S Daley, Mr M C Dance, Mr J A Davies, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Dr M R Eddy, Mr J Elenor, Mrs M Elenor, Mr T Gates, Mr G K Gibbens, Mr R W Gough, Ms A Harrison, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr C P D Hoare, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr E E C Hotson, Mrs S Howes, Mr A J King, MBE, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr S J G Koowaree, Mr R A Latchford, OBE, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr G Lymer, Mr B E MacDowall, Mr T A Maddison, Mr S C Manion, Mr R A Marsh, Mr F McKenna, Mr B Neaves, Mr M J Northey, Mr P J Oakford, Mr J M Ozog, Mr R J Parry, Mr C R Pearman, Mr L B Ridings, MBE, Mr J E Scholes, Mr W Scobie, Mr T L Shonk, Mr C Simkins, Mr J D Simmonds, MBE, Mr C P Smith, Mr D Smyth, Mrs P A V Stockell, Mr B J Sweetland, Mr A Terry, Mr R Truelove, Mr M J Vye, Mr J N Wedgbury, Mrs J Whittle, Mr M E Whybrow, Mr M A Wickham and Mrs Z Wiltshire

IN ATTENDANCE: David Cockburn (Corporate Director Strategic & Corporate Services), Peter Sass (Head of Democratic Services) and Denise Fitch (Democratic Services Manager (Council))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

45. Apologies for Absence

The Head of Democratic Services reported apologies from Mr D Baker, Mr P Harman, Mr M Heale, Mrs E Rowbotham and Mr N Thandi.

46. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests

(1) Mr G Cowan declared an interest in that both he and his wife were foster carers for Kent County Council.

(2) Mr M Baldock declared that he had recently purchased 10 Wises Lane, Sittingbourne and would amend his recorded Disclosable Pecuniary Interests accordingly.

47. Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2014 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2014 be approved as a correct record.

48. Chairman's Announcements

(a) Reduction in the voting age

The Chairman informed the Council that he had received an acknowledgement on behalf of the Prime Minister to his letter setting out the motion passed at the last County Council meeting on reducing the voting age. He undertook to inform Members when he received a full response.

(b) Office Visits

The Chairman stated that following the refurbishment to the first floor of Invicta House he and the Vice-Chairman had visited the teams. They both enjoyed the visit immensely and were now planning to visit many teams and offices across the County.

Ms Birch, the Registration and Nationality Manager, had shown them around Archbishop's Palace and he had been surprised to see so many different teams working within the building. Ms Birch would also be showing him around the register repository in Tunbridge Wells in January. The Vice-Chairman had also visited Brenchley House with Mr Gibbens at the beginning of this week, to see the work being carried out by the social care teams.

The Chairman had found these visits interesting and informative and planned many more for the New Year. He encouraged as many Members as possible to visit the different teams and various staff working across the County to see the fantastic services and frontline support that the County Council was delivering.

(c) Royal Mail's Delivery Office Visit

The Chairman stated that he had visited Royal Mail's Delivery Office in Maidstone to pass on Christmas wishes and encouragement during their busiest time of the year. He had been shown around the office by Delivery Office Manager, Steve Nelson. He had been pleased to meet many of the post office staff who went out in all weathers, and to see first-hand the effort put into delivering for the people and businesses of Kent during the run-up to Christmas.

(d) Royal Visits

The Chairman made the Council aware that there had been the following 10 Royal Visits to the County in the last six months:

HRH Duke of Kent – 3
HRH The Princess Royal – 2
HRH Duchess of Cornwall – 1

HRH Prince Henry of Wales– 1
HRH Duke of Gloucester – 2
HRH The Countess of Wessex – 1

(e) Variation of order of agenda items

The Chairman stated that in order to facilitate the more effective conduct of today's business he proposed to swap the order of items 7 & 8 on the agenda and he drew Members' attention to the version of the Outcomes Framework circulated separately.

(f) Eynsford Concert Band

The Chairman was pleased to announce that the Eynsford Concert Band had won the 2014 National Concert Band Symposium in a competition featuring some of the finest wind ensembles in the country. The band was celebrating forty years since its foundation. It attracted players from all over the south east, worked to support instrumental music particularly amongst Kent young people, and raised substantial funds for charity each year.

He had attended a spectacular concert at the Pamoja Hall, Sevenoaks staged by the band with the band of the Grenadier Guards.

(g) Honorary Alderman

The Chairman reminded Members that the additional meeting for the Honorary Aldermen would take place at 12.30pm or on the rising of the County Council whichever was the later.

(h) Carols

The Chairman invited all Members to join him for lunch with carols in the Atrium, Invicta House at 1.00 pm.

49. Questions

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.17(4), eight questions were asked and replies given, these are attached as an appendix to the minutes. Questions 9 and 10 were not asked because the time limit for this item had been reached.

50. Report by Leader of the Council (Oral)

(1) The Leader updated the County Council on events since the previous meeting.

(2) Mr Carter referred to the announcement in the Autumn Statement that the government would commit £17m of capital funding for flood defences around Tonbridge and Yalding. He stated that he had always made it absolutely clear that Kent County Council would underwrite the match funding from government, and had been consistent in expressing the expectation that this would include support through parish councils, borough councils, European funding and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). A Flood Funding Forum had been established to work with

partners at parish and borough level, and with the business communities to help fund the £17m.

(3) Mr Carter confirmed that there had also been plans for a LEP Round 2 Growth Fund bid for an additional £2.4m to help support the flood defence funding shortfall. In addition the Environment Agency was pursuing the next European funding round to see whether it was possible to attract, with partners in Europe, a substantial sum of money for these flood defences.

(4) Mr Carter expressed disappointment that, in the Autumn Statement, the government had postponed the LEP Round 2 Growth Fund. A significant amount of work had been carried out by business colleagues, officers and district and borough colleagues to produce a package of schemes for the LEP Growth Fund Round 2. He had written to Greg Clark MP expressing disappointment about this delay. He referred to the £15bn capital that had been passported to the Highways Agency to build tunnels under Stonehenge. He expressed the view that this funding could have been used to empower localism through local government and significant business partners.

(5) Mr Carter referred to the good progress being made in delivering "Facing the Challenge" and in producing the medium term financial plan which set out creative and innovative ways of making £12m of saving without impeding delivery or cutting any front line service. The medium term financial plan would be shared through the cabinet committees in January 2015.

(6) Mr Carter referred to the identification of £400-500k to retain around 70 community wardens. He also mentioned the work of Newton Europe on their risk and reward contract on re-engineering adult social services and on their work to deliver greater efficiencies in children's and preventative children's services'.

(7) Mr Carter stated that he had met with potential providers of back office functions. In the New Year there would important decisions to be taken on commissioning these services. He referred to the valuable work being undertaken by the Commissioning Advisory Board to ensure that the very best providers either in-house or external were commissioned.

(8) Mr Latchford, the Leader of the Opposition, expressed disappointment at Thanet District and Kent County Council's decisions regarding Manston Airport and the impact on job opportunities in Kent.

(9) Mr Latchford congratulated the Cabinet Member for Community Services on his decision regarding community wardens following the public consultation and referred to the motion for time limited debate later in the meeting.

(10) Regarding the Commissioning Strategy, Mr Latchford expressed his appreciation for the opportunity for his group to be party to the document. Although his group had very strong reservations about this strategy, they recognised the importance of ensuring that all outsourcing had the appropriate safeguards. He congratulated Mr Hotson, as Chairman of the Commissioning Advisory Board, on the work to progress this complex issue.

(11) Mr Latchford referred to the £17m from the government for flood defences which required match funding and the assurance given by the Leader. He mentioned the £600m the UK spent on overseas aid for flood defences.

(12) Mr Latchford expressed disappointment about the announcement relating to the LEP, a lot of hard work had gone into an excellent round 2 bid and he hoped that this work would not be wasted.

(13) Mr Cowan, Leader of the Labour Group, referred to the £17m match funding required for flood defence works in Tonbridge and Yalding. He questioned whether, as the County Council was planning increase its Council tax by 1.99% in 2015-16, it could legally ask parish councils in the area for additional Council Tax funding.

(14) In relation to funding referred to on the South East LEP website, Mr Carter addressed the Council on a point of explanation. He stated that this was round 1 funding. There had been an expectation that there would be an invitation to submit bids for round 2 which would have delivered another £55m into Kent.

(15) Mr Cowan expressed disappointment that the proposed dualling of the A2 from Lydden to Whitfield in Dover would not be going forward. He asked the Leader to inform the Council of the process by which the Kent priorities for LEP bids were established including the level of consultation with local members, district councils and MPs. He suggested that there should be a more open process for determining the allocation of local funds from regional growth fund money.

(16) Mr Cowan referred to the decision regarding the community wardens following the six-week consultation and thanked Mr Hill. He compared this to the consultation on the commissioning of the Youth Service and the response concerns raised about switching off street lights at night.

(17) Mrs Dean, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, welcomed the reversal on community wardens and reminded Members that just over a year ago the community warden service had been reconfigured and now covered a larger geographical area. She referred to the possible use of other "uniform" services, such as country park wardens, police community support officers and parking enforcement officers from the borough councils to see if by working together, they could enhance the community warden service.

(18) Mrs Dean referred to the Commissioning Advisory Board and stated that, although Members had been given a great deal of information, they did not have any control over or detail of the process. Decisions would be made on the Kent Library Trust after Christmas and she set out the level of detail that she hoped would be considered at the next meeting of the Advisory Board.

(19) Regarding the LEP regional growth fund she asked Mr Carter when he had heard about the withdrawal of round 2 funding. She also referred to the possible need to increase the robustness of the governance and decision making process of the South East LEP and the possibility that with some of the larger projects local authorities may be required to fund them up front and to be reimbursed by government on a quarterly or half-yearly basis.

(20) Mrs Dean referred to the issue of flooding and stated that neither Maidstone nor Tunbridge & Malling Borough Councils had been asked at the time of Mr Carter's statement about contributing to a precept.

(21) Mr Whybrow, Leader of the Independents Group, stated that he was delighted to see community wardens get a reprieve and expressed concern about how the savings for this would be found.

(22) Mr Whybrow referred to the Outcomes Framework and the budget situation and stated that he would like to see some of the Office for Budget Responsibility statements and the LGA's "graph of doom" featuring in the County Council's information to the public.

(23) Mr Whybrow queried why the County Council had to match fund £17m for flood defences when there was clear evidence that £34m was needed in total.

(24) Regarding the Transformation Programme, Mr Whybrow expressed unease about KCC's increasing involvement in the corporate world. He stated that his concerns had been heightened by events over the past week as well as by a draft external auditor's report. He questioned whether the County Council had the necessary corporate skills or expertise.

(25) In replying to the other group leaders' responses, Mr Carter stated that on the funding for flood amelioration, prior to the events last Christmas the Yalding scheme was low on the priority order and the chances of funding were minimal. He explained that only a very small number of schemes achieved 100% funding. He had worked very closely with Sir John Stanley to make sure that the Yalding scheme was placed higher on the list and in order to do so had to commit to finding 50% match funding. He reiterated that he had consistently stated that contributions would be needed towards the £17m match funding. He pointed out that other areas of the county would also like flood defence funding so it was unfair to expect all Kent Council Tax payers to match fund the Yalding works.

(26) Regarding the delay in the round 2 LEP funding and the comments made on the governance arrangements. Mr Carter stated that, despite the lack of clarity at national level on the governance process for LEPs, he had been as open as possible. Mr Carter stated that he considered KCC and the administration to be exceedingly open. In relation to the Commissioning Advisory Board although procurement had to be a long protracted process, the aim was to be as open and transparent and share what was sensible and intelligent at the appropriate times with Members in order to make well informed decisions.

51. Facing the Challenge: Draft Corporate Outcomes Framework for KCC

(1) Mr Carter moved and Mr Simmonds seconded the following recommendation as set out on page 53 in the report:

"The County Council is asked to agree the following:

- The draft Corporate Outcomes Framework at Appendix 1 is approved for consultation."

(2) Following a debate the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph (1) above to the vote and the votes cast were as follows:

For (67)

Mrs A Allen, Mr M Angell, Mr M Baldock, Mr M Balfour, Mr R Bird, Mr H Birkby, Mr N Bond, Mr A Bowles, Mr D Brazier, Mr R Brookbank, Mr L Burgess, Miss S Carey, Mr P Carter, Mr N Chard, Mr I Chittenden, Mr B Clark, Mrs P Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mrs M Crabtree, Mr A Crowther, Mrs V Dagger, Mr D Daley, Mr M Dance, Mr J Davies, Mr J Elenor, Mrs M Elenor, Mr T Gates, Mr G Gibbens, Mr R Gough, Mr M Harrison, Mr M Hill, Mr C Hoare, Mrs S Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr P Homewood, Mr E Hotson, Mr A King, Mr J Kite, Mr G Koowaree, Mr R Latchford, Mr R Long, Mr G Lymer, Mr B MacDowall, Mr S Manion, Mr A Marsh, Mr F McKenna, Mr B Neaves, Mr M Northey, Mr P Oakford, Mr J Ozog, Mr R Parry, Mr C Pearman, Mr L Ridings, Mr J Scholes, Mr T Shonk, Mr C Simkins, Mr J Simmonds, Mr C Smith, Mrs P Stockell, Mr B Sweetland, Mr A Terry, Mr M Vye, Mr J Wedgbury, Mrs J Whittle, Mr M Whybrow, Mr A Wickham, Mrs Z Wiltshire.

Against (11)

Mrs P Brivio, Mr C Caller, Mr G Cowan, Ms J Cribbon, Dr M Eddy, Ms A Harrison, Ms S Howes, Mr T Maddison, Mr W Scobie, Mr D Smyth, Mr R Truelove.

Abstain (0)

Motion carried

(3) RESOLVED that the draft Corporate Outcomes Framework at Appendix 1 to the report be approved for consultation.

52. Facing the Challenge: Commissioning Framework

(1) Mr Carter moved and Mr Simmonds seconded the following recommendations as set out on page 27 of the report:

“The County Council is asked to agree the following:

- The Commissioning Framework in Appendix 1 is adopted by the County Council and becomes part of the Council’s Policy Framework;
- The principles proposed within the Framework are taken forward and embedded across KCC by Directorates and Change Portfolios as appropriate.”

(2) Following a debate the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph (1) above to the vote and the votes cast were as follows:

For (51)

Mrs A Allen, Mr M Angell, Mr M Balfour, Mr A Bowles, Mr D Brazier, Miss S Carey, Mr P Carter, Mr N Chard, Mr I Chittenden, Mr B Clark, Mrs P Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mrs M Crabtree, Mrs V Dagger, Mr D Daley, Mr M Dance, Mr J Davies, Mrs M Elenor, Mr T Gates, Mr G Gibbens, Mr R Gough, Mr M Harrison, Mr M Hill, Mrs S Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr P Homewood, Mr E Hotson, Mr A King, Mr J Kite, Mr G Koowaree, Mr R Long, Mr G Lymer, Mr S Manion, Mr A Marsh, Mr M Northey, Mr P Oakford, Mr J Ozog, Mr R Parry, Mr C Pearman, Mr L Ridings, Mr J Scholes, Mr C Simkins, Mr J

Simmonds, Mr C Smith, Mrs P Stockell, Mr B Sweetland, Mr M Vye, Mr J Wedgbury, Mrs J Whittle, Mr A Wickham, Mrs Z Wiltshire.

Against (17)

Mr M Baldock, Mr N Bond, Mrs P Brivio, Mr L Burgess, Mr C Caller, Mr G Cowan, Ms J Cribbon, Dr M Eddy, Ms A Harrison, Ms S Howes, Mr B MacDowall, Mr F McKenna, Mr T Maddison, Mr W Scobie, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Smyth, Mr R Truelove.

Abstain (7)

Mr H Birkby, Mr A Crowther, Mr J Elenor, Mr C Hoare, Mr R Latchford, Mr B Neaves, Mr A Terry,

Motion carried

(3) RESOLVED that:

- a) the Commissioning Framework in Appendix 1 be adopted by the County Council and becomes part of the Council's Policy Framework;
- b) the principles proposed within the Framework be taken forward and embedded across KCC by Directorates and Change Portfolios as appropriate.

53. Motion for Time Limited Debate

(1) Mr Baldock moved and Mr Burgess seconded the following motion:

“This Council applauds the sterling work of our community wardens, and recognises the huge benefits that they bring to the communities that they serve. This Council further acknowledges that the social value they bring to those communities far outweighs the financial costs to the County Council. Consequently, we believe Kent County Council should continue to champion this scheme, publicise its achievements, and consider ways of promoting the concept to other councils.

To this end, this Council pledges its full support to our team of community wardens, and will ensure that they continue to be able to provide such a constructive role in our communities.”

(2) Mr Hill moved and Mrs Hohler seconded the followed amended motion.

“This Council applauds the sterling work of our community wardens, and recognises the huge benefits that they bring to the communities that they serve. This Council further acknowledges that the social value they bring to those communities far outweighs the financial costs to the County Council. Consequently, we believe Kent County Council should continue to champion this scheme, publicise its achievements, and consider ways of promoting the concept to other councils.

To this end, this Council pledges its full support to our team of community wardens, and **welcomes the Administration's proposals which** will ensure that they continue to be able to provide such a constructive role in our communities.”

(3) The amendment was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the original motion without the need for a vote, and the County Council then debated the substantive motion as set out in paragraph (2) above.

(4) The procedural motion “that the question be put” was moved and duly seconded by Members who had not spoken in the debate. This procedural motion was agreed without a recorded vote.

(5) The Chairman put the substantive motion as set out in paragraph 2 above which was agreed without a recorded vote.

(6) RESOLVED that this Council applauds the sterling work of our Community Wardens, and recognises the huge benefits that they bring to the communities that they serve. This Council further acknowledges that the social value they bring to those communities far outweighs the financial costs to the County Council. Consequently, we believe Kent County Council should continue to champion this scheme, publicise its achievements, and consider ways of promoting the concept to other councils.

To this end, this Council pledges its full support to our team of community wardens, and welcomes the Administration’s proposals, which will ensure that they continue to be able to provide such a constructive role in our communities.

Chairman.....
12 February 2015

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APPENDIX**COUNTY COUNCIL****Thursday 11 December 2014****Question 1****Question by Mike Eddy to
David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport**

At the Dover Joint Transportation Board of 11 September 2014 members were informed that the sewerage system of Deal and Sholden was at capacity. In view of the number of houses being planned and built in the area, what representations has the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport made to Ofwat and the privatised water companies to increase the sewerage capacity in and around Deal, and has this council advised the local planning authority of the situation?

Answer

Water Companies prepare five-year asset management plans that are agreed with OfWat, which set out the infrastructure investment they will undertake over that period and the charges they can make to their customers to fund it. Southern Water should review local growth projections when developing its five-year investment plan. The next five-year investment period will commence next April, so Southern Water should be appraised of the projected growth in Deal and planning accordingly. KCC has recently set up regular liaison meetings with main Kent water companies. At the last meeting the issue of sewer flooding in East Kent, including Deal, was raised and it was agreed that a representative from the wastewater side of the Southern Water business will attend future meetings to discuss their plans.

Southern Water is a statutory consultee for any development that proposes to connect to the public sewer. If an increase in capacity is required there is an opportunity for the sewerage undertaker to negotiate with the developer an appropriate S106 agreement at the application stage. However, it should be noted that new development has an automatic right to connect to the public sewer, which the water companies cannot refuse.

Any new development is required by the NPPF to maintain the existing discharge of surface water from the site and is encouraged to reduce it. We understand that Dover District Council is aware of the wastewater capacity in Deal and are proposing to adopt the sustainable drainage measures for proposed development in Deal.

Question 2

Question by Roger Latchford to Paul Carter, Leader of the Council

Manston Airport:

What steps has KCC taken to demonstrate support for the motion passed with unanimous support on the 17th July , and what resources has it or is it willing to give to support Thanet District Council and partners pursuing a CPO?

Answer

Thank you Roger for providing me with the opportunity to update members on Manston.

If Members cast their minds back they will recall this Council unanimously agreed the following motion on 17th July:

“That Kent County Council supports the actions taken so far by Thanet District Council to retain Manston as a regional airport. We recognise the value that a regional airport brings to East Kent and are disappointed at its closure. Kent County Council will explore with Thanet District Council ways in which it can support proposals to retain Manston as an airport.”

As I made clear during the debate, Kent County Council would consider how best it could support any compulsory purchase order by Thanet District Council subject to a viable business case being presented by a commercial partner.

Thanet District Council’s Cabinet received legal advice on 31st July which concurred with this stance that in order to demonstrate the case for a CPO is “*compelling*”, “*the Council should identify a CPO indemnity partner capable of delivering a 20 year business plan*” for the site.

Eager to support any sensible proposition, Kent County Council has been in contact with Thanet District Council to request copies of any expressions of interests received from any prospective indemnity partners so we could determine how best to support any viable business plan.

Thanet District Council has made us aware of only one company that made a substantive proposal. Naturally we have requested copies of this party’s business plan, but due to a confidentiality agreement between Thanet District Council and this company, Thanet is prevented from disclosing the information provided by the company to Kent County Council.

I had already asked RiverOak - which I believe is the company that has been in discussions with Thanet District Council - if I could see their business case and they have refused to share it with me.

Thanet District Council's Cabinet will tonight receive a report that the company that has approached them *“does not demonstrate that it has the appropriate financial status or has committed investors to:*

- 1) enable it - if required - to acquire the site by private treaty prior to a CPO process being commenced*
- 2) fund the preparation of a robust case for CPO acquisition*
- 3) meet the expected compensation costs, and*
- 4) to develop the airport and operate it viably in the long-term”*

In the absence of a viable proposition from a possible airport operator, KCC has worked with the new owners of Manston who are promising a very exciting redevelopment of Manston – including 4,000 new jobs and £1 billion new investment in Thanet.

Question 3

Question by Zita Wiltshire to Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

Thanet has again seen rising complaints regarding Children's Homes and private foster carers who draw disruptive children from other local authorities into Thanet. This includes enhanced payments to foster carers, undermining the ethos of care, and replacing it with business incentive.

How does KCC control such activity, considering the blight on resident lives and the impacts on education, hospitals and other services, whose own public service ethos unwillingly subsidises this activity?

Answer

Thank you for the question. As Members will know, both the previous Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services and I have proactively campaigned for other Local Authorities to not place their children in care in Thanet, and other districts in Kent, due to the strain on resources including education, police and CAMHS.

For these reasons the Council's own policy is to not place non-Thanet children in care in Thanet. However the Council is unable to prevent the independent sector recruiting in Kent, or other Local Authorities placing in Kent when that placement meets the needs of the individual, and the placement does not impact on the resources available for our children in care.

I would like to point out that not all children placed in Thanet or elsewhere in Kent will be disruptive. These are children who have often not had the best start in life.

Financial incentives for the recruitment of foster carers are becoming a national issue and the Council has raised its concerns with the Fostering Networks National Steering Group, with this item being tabled for discussion at the next meeting.

Additionally, in part due to the campaign this council has carried out, this year has seen amendments come into force to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (the “Care Planning Regulations”), and a new amendment to Regulation 31 of the Children’s Homes Regulations. These amendments should see an impact in the reduction of other Local Authority children in care placed in Kent. I am happy to provide further details of the amendments outside of this meeting.

Question 4

Question by Martin Vye to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

Given the outstanding A level results achieved by students at both Simon Langton Grammar Schools, Girls’ and Boys’, in Canterbury, and their ongoing success at university, will the Cabinet Member for Economic Development say what he plans to do to attract high tech physics-based companies to East Kent, to build on and develop this undoubted local strength?

Answer

All of us in the County should be very proud of the extraordinary success of the Simon Langton Grammar Schools enabling young people to work on authentic science research at the school, with many of them continuing with science and engineering at University. I particularly welcome their success in encouraging more girls to engage with science and engineering at school and continuing at University. We are working with the Head Teacher and his staff to promote the Langton Star Centre to become the basis of a National Centre for Science Research in Schools whose aim would be to extend national research collaborations for students and train and support the science training profession to embrace this model. This would link with the activity of Locate in Kent to bring together a science-based cluster of innovative companies in Kent.

Question 5

Question by Martin Whybrow to Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Democratic Services

Why do the summary records for members' attendance at meetings no longer appear on the KCC website? Was this an oversight, in which case when will they be put back? Was it a deliberate decision, in which case, what were the reasons for this loss of transparency for residents, why were members not informed of the change, and should the matter not have gone through the Selection and Member Services Committee for approval?

Answer

The information on the Council's website relating to Members' attendance at formal Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings is produced via a reporting facility on the Council's Committee Management System known as modern.gov. The statistics are generated automatically when the minutes of the various meetings are uploaded to the system, which confirms the names of those Members who were present as expected and those who for whatever reason were absent and had to send a substitute. It is a statistical snapshot about just one of the many responsibilities that elected Members perform in terms of representing the communities they serve and gives no information about the genuine reasons why individual Members cannot attend all of the meetings they are invited to.

Following representations from a number of Members, I formed the view that these statistics, whilst accurate, could lead to an entirely misleading impression being given about how hard Members work for their communities, which goes way beyond attending formal meetings. I consulted the Head of Democratic Services, who confirmed that there is no requirement to publish these summary statistics of meeting attendance in addition to publishing the minutes themselves, which is a legal requirement and I, therefore, took the decision to remove them from the website. The statistics remain available for any Member or member of the public who may wish to see them. In fact, officers have recently responded to a Freedom of Information request about the attendance at formal meetings by Members of the UKIP group on KCC.

As far as I am aware, the Selection and Member Services Committee was not asked to sanction the purchase or deployment of the modern.gov system some 7 years ago or agree to the use of the automatic meeting attendance function, which is just one part of that system's functionality. This, together with the fact that it is not a requirement to publish these statistical summaries led me to conclude that the Committee did not need to be asked to approve this measure.

However, I have asked for a report to be prepared for the Selection and Member Services Committee to consider early in the New Year, which will look at innovative and creative ways each individual Member can demonstrate to the communities they serve the total contribution that they make to the Council on their behalf and I look forward to that discussion with colleagues from all political parties.

Question 6

Question by Rob Bird to Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

Energy bills can be a significant expense for our schools. In recent years a number of schools across the country have arranged for solar energy companies to install panels on their premises. Thus the schools have significantly reduced their electricity bills and significantly reduced their carbon footprint for zero capital outlay, a true win win.

Accordingly, would the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform advise how many KCC controlled schools have installed equipment for generating renewable energy, what the value of the savings has been and what encouragement and advice KCC is providing to those schools that haven't?

Answer

The Authority is aware of 29 Kent schools (both maintained and non-maintained) that have solar panels. This is not a definitive list, but is informed by Officer knowledge as well as data from LASER.

We are able to estimate the electricity savings for 16 of these 29 schools, and the collective figure is £13,436.70. We have no data on any schools receiving the government's feed in tariff payments.

KCC do not currently provide finance for, or actively promote the various finance offers from, the private sector to install solar panels in schools, due to a number of risks identified, but officers do provide information and advice to schools that request it. KCC does provide support to schools directed at energy efficiency projects, as these type of projects still provide more significant energy savings than solar panels. We also offer interest free invest-to-save financing and just recently we held a successful campaign to promote the benefits of this finance scheme and also LED lighting in partnership with the schools finance team. As a result we have 40 school enquiries, these schools will receive a free survey and quote for LED lighting or any other energy saving project they are keen to explore. Unfortunately, this finance is not available for solar panels, as to qualify projects must pay back within 7 years or less.

Question 7

Question by Brian Clark to Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

With the backdrop of the Child Sex Scandal in Rotherham and the release of Ofsted's report "The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here could it", Debbie Jones, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care, said it "cannot be acceptable that local authorities and partners are still failing to grasp and deal with abuse effectively". She stated, "We are calling on all local authorities and their partners to ensure that they have a comprehensive multi-agency strategy and action plan in place to tackle child sexual exploitation,"

In light of these comments and recent events, can the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services say what steps is KCC taking to ensure it is not an authority considered to be failing to face up to its responsibilities in preventing child sexual exploitation.

Answer

Thank you for your question and I would like to assure Members that this authority takes child sexual exploitation very seriously. As Members may know, following the well documented exploitation of children in Rochdale and elsewhere, Ofsted undertook a Child Sexual Exploitation thematic inspection which included Kent. Although not an assessed inspection, this has confirmed both our areas of good practice and those that make sense to strengthen further.

Ofsted described the recent major multi-agency operation in Kent as a highly impressive child focussed piece of work, that was well resourced and with strong cross agency information sharing. The quality of the Kent and Medway multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy was also recognised.

However I, the officers and our partners are not complacent. We are continuing to raise standards by ensuring return interviews for children who go missing are of consistently high quality and that trends are carefully analysed across agencies. The Kent Children's Safeguarding Board has also raised the priority of dealing with Child Sexual Exploitation. Additionally the multi-agency training on exploitation is now mandatory for all our staff who work directly with children and young people.

Question 8

Question by Andrew Bowles to Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

"Could I first congratulate the Cabinet Member and his department for progress so far in enabling our residents to access high speed Broadband. I am sure he is able to access more up to date figures than I but the latest figures I possess for October 2014 show high speed fibre Broadband is available to in excess of 610,00 homes in Kent.

Much of my division is scheduled to go live during the current phase, October 2014 to October 2015. My concern is the small number of communities, many in my division, who are outside the areas where coverage is currently scheduled. There are communities along the North Downs such as Throwley and Stalisfield that have no clear information as to what level of service upgrade they may expect or when. May I add that I know this also applies to some communities in the Borough of Maidstone.

Can the Cabinet Member update the County Council on the matters raised in my question?"

Answer

KCC has made significant progress in delivering the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) Phase 1 project across the County, since it began in March 2013, and the project remains on track.

The project is bringing superfast broadband to over 120,000 properties by the end of 2015 in areas that will not benefit from commercial upgrade programmes. The project also aims to ensure that all properties in the intervention area have access to a standard broadband service of at least 2 mbps. Further details on the project and the deployment plan – including a 7 digit postcode checker and an interactive map are publically available on www.kent.gov.uk/broadband.

Over 60,000 homes and businesses have so far benefited from the Kent and Medway BDUK Phase 1 Project who would otherwise have been left with no or slow broadband. We are currently procuring a Phase 2 project. This is part of BDUK's national superfast extension programme which is seeking to ensure that at least 95% of properties across the UK can access superfast broadband. At a local level, our overriding intention is to get as much superfast and fibre-based broadband to as many premises as possible in Kent.

We are also working with BDUK as a pilot location for their 'Innovation Market Testing' Scheme. This initiative involves 8 small-scale field trials across the UK of new technological approaches for delivering superfast broadband services in 'final 5% areas' – of which the Swale-based pilot specifically targeting communities on the North Downs is one. We understand that the findings of this work will be used by BDUK to inform the development of a new national BDUK Phase 3 Programme to bring faster broadband to communities that will not benefit from Phase 1 or Phase 2 project work.

I have noted what Mr Bowles has said about the communities he mentioned in his question. It should be stressed that delivering to 'final 5%' locations is challenging. However, KCC remains committed to working with local partners and BDUK to realise our longstanding ambition of wanting all rural communities to have access to superfast broadband services.

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