

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Mote Hall Leisure Centre, Maidstone, Kent ME15 7RN on Thursday, 27 May 2021.

PRESENT: Mr G K Gibbens (Chairman), Mr M J Northey (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A D Allen, MBE, Mr Baker, Mr M Baldock, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr D Beaney, Mr C Beart, Mrs C Bell, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr A Booth, Mr A Brady, Mr D L Brazier, Mr C Broadley, Mrs B Bruneau, Mr S R Campkin, Mr T Cannon, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs S Chandler, Mr N J D Chard, Mr I S Chittenden, Mrs P T Cole, Mr P Cole, Mr N J Collor, Ms K Constantine, Mr G Cooke, Mr P C Cooper, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr D S Daley, Mr M C Dance, Ms M Dawkins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr M Dendor, Mrs L Game, Mr R W Gough, Ms K Grehan, Ms S Hamilton, Mr P M Harman, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr A R Hills, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr Lehmann, Mr B H Lewis, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr S C Manion, Mr R A Marsh, Ms M McArthur, Mr J P McInroy, Ms J Meade, Mr J Meade, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mr J M Ozog, Mrs L Parfitt-Reid, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson, Mr A M Ridgers, Mr D Robey, Mr D Ross, Mr C Simkins, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr B J Sweetland, Mr R J Thomas, Mr D Watkins, Mr A Weatherhead, Mr S Webb, Mr J Wright and Ms L Wright

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Cockburn (Corporate Director Strategic & Corporate Services) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies for Absence
(Item 1)

The General Counsel reported apologies from Mr Shonk.

2. Election of Chairman
(Item 2)

(Mr Gibbens the present Chairman presided for this item)

- (1) Mr Kite proposed and Mr Brazier seconded that Mrs A Allen be appointed Chairman of the County Council.

Agreed unanimously

- (2) Thereupon Mrs Allen took the chair, made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office and returned thanks for her election.

- (3) Tributes were paid to Mr Gibbens with thanks for the manner in which he had carried out his duties as Chairman of the Council from May 2020 until the present day.
- (4) Mr Gibbens suitably replied.
- (5) Tributes were also paid to Mr Northey, the Vice-Chairman of the Council from May 2020 until the present day.

3. Election of Vice-Chairman
(Item 3)

(1) Mr Hills proposed and Mr Simkins seconded that Mrs L Game be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council.

Agreed unanimously

(2) Mrs Game made her Declaration of Acceptance of Office and returned thanks for her appointment.

4. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
(Item 4)

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2021
(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6. The Returning Officer to submit the returns of persons elected to be County Councillors until 2025
(Item 6)

- (1) The County Returning Officer for the County of Kent submitted the return of persons elected to be county councillors for the electoral divisions of the county as reproduced in the papers for this meeting.
- (2) The Returning Officer and the Chairman thanked the staff who had helped organise and run the 2021 elections, in what had been a challenging and unique year.
- (3) RESOLVED that the return of Councillors duly elected to the County Council for the period until May 2025 be noted.

7. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 7)

The Chairman welcomed all newly elected and returning members of the County Council.

8. Election of Leader
(Item 8)

Mr Oakford proposed and Mrs Cole seconded that Mr R Gough be elected Leader of the Council until the annual meeting of the council in 2025.

Carried without a formal vote

9. Appointment of Leader of the Opposition
(Item 9)

Mr Hook moved and Mrs Wood seconded that Dr L Sullivan be appointed Leader of the Opposition.

Carried without a formal vote

10. Corporate Parenting Panel - Notes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021
(Item 10)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 16 February 2021 be noted.

11. Questions
(Item 11)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 11 questions were asked and replies given. A record of all questions put and answers given at the meeting is available [online](#) with the papers for this meeting.

12. Report by Leader of the Council (Oral)
(Item 12)

- (1) The Leader opened his update by thanking the County Council for electing him as Leader and thanking Mr Oakford and Mrs Cole for their kind words in proposing and seconding him. He thanked Ben Watts, his team, and the district and borough councils for their work delivering the recent elections in very challenging circumstances. He said he was delighted (and relieved) that the election had resulted in a significant Conservative victory and acknowledged the impact of national factors on elections to Kent County Council. He said that the vaccination programme had played a part in the recent elections but the record of the administration and its plans for the future were also important factors. The Leader said he would divide his remarks into four sections: recovery, quality of life, responding to government initiatives and policies, and events.

Economic, social, and environmental recovery of the county.

- (2) The Leader said the administration would support the economic recovery of the county and that his remarks were predicated on the anticipated relaxation of restrictions imposed to combat Covid-19. He said the county could benefit from the increasing numbers of businesses looking to re-locate in areas around London and that work was underway through the employment taskforce to address Kent's structural issues as a low skill and low wage economy. He said the taskforce was an excellent example of KCC using its strategic role to set out a policy and bring together a range of people and organisations who could address these issues. He went on to say that as the authority emerged from the pandemic, decisions would have to be made quickly on ways of working, the shape of the authority's estate, and the delivery of services, and these decisions would take into account the changes brought about by Covid-19 and lockdown. He said it was important to continue to work with others, particularly colleagues in district and borough councils, as many decisions made by KCC and other organisations would have an impact on the shape of new communities and town centres.
- (3) The Leader said that a key element of social recovery was the Reconnect programme for young people which would be a major theme over the coming months. In addition, the authority had supported the county's poorest residents during the pandemic through emergency grants, free school meals and other programmes. Much of this support had been provided using grants from government; however, as the grant regime was coming to an end, the authority was looking at more sustainable ways of supporting communities. This would be done, in part, by developing an extensive partnership with the voluntary and community sector through initiatives such as Crowdfund Kent, the use of member grants to support communities, and by targeted support in areas such as fuel poverty.
- (4) The Leader said tremendous work had been done to progress the environmental agenda under the leadership of Susan Carey and Tony Hills and he hoped to see Miss Carey back with the Council very soon. He said the authority had committed, during the last term, to being 'net zero' on its estates and operations by 2030 and significant progress had already been made including securing over £20.6 million from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. He said the authority controlled fewer of the levers to achieve the wider-ranging county target of 'net zero' by 2050; however, in addition to managing its own operations the authority had a role as a community leader in helping to achieve this target.

Quality of Life

- (5) The Leader said that many of the themes of the Council's five-year plan, which had been put on hold in March 2020 because of the pandemic, were still valid and merited attention. Some of the proposals in the plan addressed the sense of deteriorating amenity which had been raised in some of the questions to cabinet members and, while this was often a national issue, there were steps that could be taken locally by working with partner organisations and colleagues in district and borough councils. He said that Highways England was responsible for clearing litter and maintaining many of the roads that were the subject of complaints received by the authority. He went on to say, however, that the authority would continue to act as a community leader and seek ways to address these issues with Highways England as living in an attractive environment was important for the community's sense of wellbeing. In relation to housebuilding, he said the five-year plan emphasised the importance of providing services and the core infrastructure in tandem with housing developments and not after them.

Government Initiatives

- (6) The Leader referred to the all-member briefing, that had taken place the previous week, on changes taking place within the NHS as a result of the Health and Social Care White Paper. He said this was an important issue which would be considered more fully at the County Council meeting in July. He said working effectively in partnership with the health sector with a shared vision about population health, and an increasing understanding of the work of the public health team would be important in shaping how communities could support better health and better social care over the coming years. He said that social care reform was a continuing issue and the County Councils' Network had been driving some of the debate nationally. KCC, through its own operations and initiatives, such as the 'Making a Difference Everyday' initiative, was seeking to be ensure it was able to deal with whatever system emerged from the national debate.
- (7) The Leader said that the National Bus Strategy was perhaps the biggest change in non-metropolitan bus services in a 35- year period and together with the Department of Transport's Active Travel initiative contained both perils and opportunities to which the authority was seeking to respond in the immediate term.

Events

- (8) The Leader said that many issues not within the direct control of the authority would continue to shape the future in Kent. He mentioned, in particular, the aftermath of the Brexit transition period. He said Kent had come through the end of transition better than had been feared, and better than the reasonable worst-case scenario. He also acknowledged that, before Christmas when the French government shut its border, there had been an unreasonable worst-case scenario which had a profound impact on Kent and particularly on East Kent. He went on to say that issues such as further changes in import controls and passenger traffic would continue to have an impact within the county and that the authority would continue to work closely with district councils, members of parliament and government to ensure that Kent's, particularly East Kent's, interests were protected.
- (9) The Leader then said that the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum arriving in Kent was greater than it had been this time last year and reminded members of the way in which the authority was responding to this crisis. He said that the authority continued to argue the case with the government for a mandated national transfer system.
- (10) He then concluded his update by saying the administration had been returned by the electorate to deliver on the economic, social, and environmental recovery of the county, and to build for a better and long-term future. He thanked the Kent electors who had put their trust in the administration by voting for them and said the administration would seek to live up to that trust.
- (11) Dr Sullivan, Leader of the Labour Group responded to the Leader's update. She said she welcomed the appointment of Mrs Allen as Chairman of the County Council particularly because of her passion for young people and her desire to see them grow and develop. She congratulated Mrs Game on her appointment as Vice-Chairman of the Council and said her experiences of being chairman of the Children's Young People and Education Cabinet Committee would stand her in good stead.

- (12) Dr Sullivan thanked officers at KCC as well as in the district and borough councils for their efforts in the recent well-run elections and for their efforts in supporting meetings in challenging and usual circumstances over the last year. She acknowledged that a number of members present were also district or borough councillors and suggested that these twin-hatters had a role to play in developing the relationship between the County Council and the district and borough councils. She congratulated the new administration on their election victory and said she looked forward to participating in regular, robust, and thorough scrutiny of their proposed strategies and decisions.
- (13) She offered her commiserations to members who had lost their seats in the recent election. She paid tribute to Dara Farrell, who had been the youngest leader of the Labour group at KCC. She also paid tribute to John Burden, who had been elected to Kent County Council, in a by-election, two-years ago. She said he had enjoyed serving on the Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee and on the Planning Applications Committee. She thanked them for their service to Kent County Council. She then welcomed new and returning members of the Labour group including, Karen Constantine who was the new deputy Leader of the group, as well as Kelly Grehan, Jackie Meade, Alister Brady, Mel Dawkins and Barry Lewis.
- (14) She acknowledged the significant challenges facing the Council which the Leader had outlined and said her group would play its part in facilitating Kent to bounce back stronger after the pandemic. She hoped that discussion and debate in areas where her group disagreed with the administration could be conducted maturely and that a wide range of experiences, qualifications and backgrounds could be brought to bear on every issue. She said she was looking forward to a direction being set and bold new ways forward being agreed to make Kent the best place in which to live, grow up and grow old.
- (15) Mr Hook, Leader of Liberal Democratic Group, congratulated all 80 members who had been elected to Kent Council and, in particular, those who were elected for the first time. He said members had a great array of skills and experience that would be of value to the Council. He referred in particular to Mike Sole, who had decades of experience as a grassroots community campaigner in East Kent, and Richard Streatfeild who, in addition to his experiences in business and on the frontline in Afghanistan, had spent many years championing the mental health of those who had served in armed conflicts.
- (16) Mr Hook said that at the end of April 2021, 4,742 residents of Kent had died from Covid-19. He said his group recognised the burden the pandemic had placed on the Leader and on officers. He also said there was huge task ahead to help people survive any further waves of Covid-19 and to support the recovery of physical health, livelihoods and jobs, and mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- (17) While congratulating Mr Gough and his group on their return to control, he said that there was a gap between the votes cast by people in the election and number of seats allocated by the system. In Kent fewer than 5 in 10 votes had been converted to almost 8 in 10 seats. He invited the Leader and the Cabinet to work with the Liberal Democrats to find common ground on many issues that brought more people in Kent together than the number who supported one party or another. He said the Liberal Democrat group would take its role of opposition seriously by scrutinising proposals and offering alternative or additional plans and ideas. He also said the group would fight hard for the towns and villages of Kent and for liberal values in the Council's work. He went on to say that his group wanted a council that strove for excellence, was relentlessly outward looking, measured its performance against other counties and looked at local government

across the world with a view to adopting good ideas and practice from elsewhere. He said that over the last 15 years, technology had changed every aspect of life and anticipated that artificial intelligence would have an even bigger impact over the next 15 years. He asked that the Council scope, on a cross-party basis, the opportunities presented by such new technologies and to become the leading council in the UK in their adoption.

- (18) He concluded by congratulating all members on their success in the election and extended his best wishes to all former members.
- (19) Mr Stepto, Leader of the Green and Independent Group, started by thanking officers and members for making the four new Green and Independent members welcome, and for helping them to understand how the Council functioned. He said his group awaited with interest the authority's strategic plan and shared the Leader's concerns regarding the balance of housing and infrastructure. He said new ways of working implemented in response to the pandemic had created opportunities for a review of the use of the council's assets and an examination of ways of improving employees' quality of life. He also said that KCC should collaborate with district councils to find new ways of revitalising high streets which had been badly affected by the pandemic.
- (20) Mr Stepto said his group would monitor KCC's progress in fulfilling its 2030 and 2050 climate targets and would continue to make the case for divestment from fossil fuels begun by Mr Whybrow, the previous Green Party leader. He referred to legal judgements in the Netherlands against Shell and Exxon which had profound implications for fossil fuel companies' profitability and financial performance. He also said that his group wanted to see more frequent and affordable bus services and improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. He welcomed the Bus Back Better programme linked to the national bus strategy as it would encourage a modal shift from the car.
- (21) He concluded by saying that his group looked forward to working constructively with members of all political parties and with officers.
- (22) Mr Gough thanked the leaders of the opposition groups for their remarks and congratulated Dr Sullivan and Mr Hook on becoming leaders of their groups and welcomed Mr Stepto to the role. He hoped that the virtual meeting of group leaders held on the previous day was the beginning of a good dialogue and constructive working between the groups. He acknowledged that there would always be points of disagreement, but that it was possible to work together or to disagree in ways that maintained a respectful and constructive relationship particularly as all members had a common interest in the welfare of the people of Kent.
- (23) Mr Gough welcomed all new members and said he looked forward to getting to know them. He said the prospects for the next four years were bright given the wealth and range of experiences among members. He also agreed with the sentiments that had been expressed by the group leaders about former members from across all parties who had not been returned in the election.
- (24) He reiterated his previous comments about the proposed five-year strategic plan which had been shelved in March 2020 because of the Covid-19 crisis and referred to the Interim Strategic Plan which had been approved by the County Council in December 2020. He said he would like to draw on the points of view and skills of all members and hoped he had set out the key issues and challenges as well as the emerging opportunities during his update.

- (25) The Leader noted with interest Mr Hook's comments about technology and said he too thought the authority did and should continue to be outward looking and seek comparisons both with its peer group of councils and more widely, and that KCC should never become an organisation that took a 'not invented here' attitude to innovation.
- (26) He concluded by re-stating his welcome to all members and in particular to the group leaders.
- (27) RESOLVED that the Leader's update be noted.

13. Proportionality and Appointment to Committees and other bodies
(Item 13)

- (1) Mr Gough proposed and Mr Oakford seconded the following motion:
"The County Council is asked to
 - (a) DETERMINE the total number of committee places; the allocation of those places between the political groups; and the allocation of places on certain bodies;
 - (b) AGREE that the proportionality and committee seat allocation will be reviewed at the next County Council meeting following the Elham Valley Division election.
 - (c) AGREE that Selection and Member Services Committee will make appointments to outside bodies, except for those which fall to be made by the Leader of the Council; and
 - (d) AGREE to give delegated authority to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the four Group leaders to adjust the allocation of committee places in order to conform to overall proportionality requirements."
- (2) The motion set out above was agreed without a formal vote.
- (3) RESOLVED that:
 - (a) the total number of committee places; the allocation of those places between the political groups; and the allocation of places on certain bodies as set out in the report be approved.
 - (b) the Selection and Member Services Committee make the appointments to outside bodies, except for those which fall to be made by the Leader of the Council; and
 - (c) delegated authority be given to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the four Group leaders to adjust the allocation of committee places in order to conform to overall proportionality requirements.