

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held virtually at 10am on Monday, 22 June 2020.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Miss S J Carey, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr P J Oakford, Mr M D Payne, Mrs S Prendergast and Mr M Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr E Bourner (Asset Manager Drainage, Structures and Safety Barriers), Mr S Jones (Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste), Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning Analytics), Mr M Scrivener (Corporate Risk Manager), Mr M Tant (Flood and Water Manager) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **141. Chairman's Introduction**

*(Item 1)*

Mr Gough said the meeting had started 15 minutes later than advertised to enable members to attend the virtual flag-raising ceremony for the Armed Forces Day. He then outlined the items on the agenda.

#### **142. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

There were no apologies or substitutes.

#### **143. Declaration of Interests by Member in Items on the Agenda for this meeting**

*(Item 3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **144. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 April 2020**

*(Item 4)*

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2020 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

#### **145. Cabinet Member Updates**

*(Item 5)*

- (1) Mrs Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health) provided an update on the disbursement of money received from the government's Infection Control Fund. The first tranche of funding had been received with the second instalment due in July. 75% of the funding would be distributed to care

homes in accordance with a set formula, with the balance allocated to home care and other care providers. She also referred to: the planning underway to deal with any local outbreaks of coronavirus; test centres in Ebbsfleet and Ashford; and plans for 'pop-up' test centres if there were localised outbreaks of infection.

- (2) Mrs Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) gave an update on work undertaken in relation to the Change for Kent Children's programme including: the success, for the second consecutive year, in recruiting newly qualified social workers to increase resources within the children's social work teams. In addition, ten social work apprentices had also been taken on. Mrs Chandler also referred to the critical situation in relation to the arrival of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. 509 children were in the care of KCC, of whom 252 had arrived this year, including 60 who had arrived in June. She said additional government funding and assistance with finding suitable placements for these children outside the county was very welcome and had reduced the cost to Kent residents by £5m this year. However, if children continued to arrive over the summer, the authority's capacity would come under further pressure and, in the longer-term, additional funding from government and a sustainable national transfer scheme was needed.
- (3) Mr Long (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) said that children in year 5, many of whom were due to take the Kent Test, would not return to school until September and he was, therefore, considering proposals to delay the test and to increase the number of schools that could be selected on the secondary common application form for one year only. 91% of schools, that had responded to the consultation, supported the proposal to delay the test by one month. Mr Long also said that 5,000 pupils were attending school before half-term, and the number had increased to 10,000 after half-term with 19,000 attending last week. Mr Long concluded by saying that many schools were providing an excellent online education offer.
- (4) Mr Payne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) said he was seeking to lock in the benefits of lockdown for the future, and in particular the reduction in car journeys. A bid had been submitted to the government's Active Travel Fund and members would be consulted about any future bids.
- (5) Miss Carey (Cabinet Member for the Environment) said that all household waste and recycling centres were now open. When the sites re-opened on 15 May, there were 20,000 slots which could be booked online by residents and this number had now increased to just under 23,000. 90% of the slots available at some centres were booked and more slots would be made available as soon as it was possible. Miss Carey also said that she had joined today's Cabinet meeting remotely from Worrall House as she was attending the 'switch-on' of 508 solar panels on its roof. She said that 1500 solar panels had been installed on five KCC buildings as part of a project to reduce the authority's carbon emissions to zero.
- (6) Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) said the births registration service had re-started on Wednesday, 17 June. A backlog of 3,500 births to be registered had built up since the service had been closed in

March. 2,300 appointments had been made in 12 locations across the county and he anticipated that the backlog would be cleared within 4-6 weeks. The registration of deaths continued to be conducted over the phone. There was no confirmation of the date when weddings could take place, but it was likely they would resume in July.

- (7) Mrs Prendergast (Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement and People) said that the flow of relevant and timely communications to both residents and staff had been, and would continue to be, a key priority for her service during the pandemic. As lockdown restrictions were eased, attention had been turning to how the county might move forward and a residents' platform was being developed to make it easier for residents to contribute thoughts and ideas on proposals and strategies. Mrs Prendergast referred to the 'Kent Together' initiative which acted as a 'front door' for those who needed help and support during the pandemic and brought together a range of voluntary and statutory agencies. She referred to the survey that had been undertaken to understand how staff were feeling about working from home and about future ways of working. The results of the survey were being analysed and the intention was to increase support to staff, especially to those who found the new arrangements challenging. She concluded by thanking staff for their efforts over the previous 12 weeks.
- (8) Mr Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) said that of 377 buildings occupied by KCC, 63 were currently open and providing essential services to residents. He also said that 6,500 members of staff were currently working at home compared with an average of 400 per day prior to the pandemic. In line with government guidance staff would continue to work at home. A risk assessment, using the 50-page government guidance document, was underway to decide which buildings could be re-occupied, although he anticipated that occupancy levels would be between 20% and 30% of pre-pandemic levels. He anticipated that any building that was critical to service provision would be opened by September.
- (9) There was no update from Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development)

#### **146. Revenue & Capital Budget Outturn 2019/20**

*(Item 6)*

- (1) Mr Oakford introduced the report, which set out the provisional revenue and capital budget outturn position for 2019-20, including a final update on key activity data for the highest risk budgets. He was pleased to announce that the authority had been able to present a balanced budget for the twentieth consecutive year. He also referred to the pressure on expenditure within Children's Services, which had an overspend of £8 million and the fact that, despite funding cuts and increased pressure on services, the authority had made savings of £700 million over the previous nine years. Mr Oakford said that much of the variance in the capital budget could be attributed to the re-phasing of projects, and he anticipated being able to report over a longer time frame at the next meeting. He thanked directors and staff at all levels for their focussed effort and dedication to residents in delivering a balanced budget.

- (2) Zena Cooke drew the Cabinet's attention to two areas of significant financial pressure, namely the spend on asylum services and the expenditure on high needs educational services.
- (3) Mr Gough, on behalf of the Cabinet, congratulated the Finance team and officers across the authority for their continued efforts in managing budgets.
- (4) Resolved to:
  - (a) note the report, including the provisional outturn position for 2019-20 for both revenue and capital;
  - (b) agree that £1.355m of the 2019-20 revenue underspending be rolled forward to fund existing commitments, as detailed in section 2 of Appendix 1 of the report;
  - (c) agree that £0.187 of the 2019-20 revenue underspending be rolled forward to fund the re-phasing of existing initiatives, as detailed in section 3 of Appendix 1 of the report;
  - (d) agree that £1.564 of the 2019-20 revenue underspending be rolled forward to fund the bid relating to Local Member Grants detailed in section 4 of Appendix 1 of the report;
  - (e) agree that the £3.121m remaining underspend be set aside in the earmarked reserve to support future years' budgets;
  - (f) agree that the £32.654m of capital re-phasing from 2019-20 be added into the 2020-21 and later years' capital budgets, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report;
  - (g) agree the capital cash limit changes outlined in Appendix 3 of the report;
  - (h) agree the contributions to and from reserves, as reflected in Appendix 6 of the report, which included all appropriate and previously agreed transfers to and from reserves.

#### **147. Capital Programme 2020-23 and Revenue Budget 2020-21**

*(Item 7)*

- (1) Mr Oakford introduced the report, which provided an update on the financial impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and the subsequent economic fallout, including: the additional funding provided by central government; the Council's estimated expenditure on the emergency response; the likely loss of income; and potential delays to savings plans. He said an initial assessment indicated a significant shortfall in the emergency grant received to date resulting in a substantial projected financial gap. He said all reserves, including ring-fenced reserves, were being reviewed in recognition that a proportion of them might be required to cover any shortfall. He also said there would be a fundamental review of both the revenue budget and the capital programme and that it was

proposed to seek approval for a revised budget at the County Council meeting in September.

- (2) Zena Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance) emphasised the importance of re-casting the budget and the challenges associated with producing a report to County Council in September. She also said assumptions made in the report, being considered by Cabinet, might need to be revised, in the light of announcements from government in relation to local authority finances.
- (3) Mr Gough said that, while the initial focus would be on re-casting the revenue budget for 2020/21, it was also necessary to look further ahead as the collection rates for council tax and business rates would have an impact on the budget for 2021/22.
- (4) Resolved to:
  - (a) endorse a fundamental review of the 2020-21 revenue budget and 2020-23 capital programme in light of the significant changes since the budget was approved in February 2020;
  - (b) consider and propose a revised revenue budget for 2020-21 and 2020-23 capital programme at County Council on 10th September 2020;
  - (c) note that, despite the significant financial impact of the pandemic, the Corporate Director of Finance was not considering a section 114 notice at this time.

#### **148. Quarterly Performance Report, Quarter 4 2019-20**

*(Item 8)*

- (1) Mr Gough invited Rachel Kennard (Chief Analyst) to introduce the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR). Ms Kennard said the report covered the period up to the end of March 2020 by which time Coronavirus was already having an impact on some services. She drew the Cabinet's attention to the high-level summary of performance set out in section 2 of the report and referred to the KPIs which were rated red. These included: EHCPs issued within 20 weeks; 16-18 year olds starting apprenticeships; and the percentage of adult social care initial contacts resolved at first point of contact
- (2) Ms Kennard drew attention to the proposed planned changes to the Quarterly Performance Reports for 2020/21 set out in Appendix 2 of the report. The Cabinet members welcomed the proposed changes to the reporting of direction of travel data. However, they also said that in-year changes to the methodology should be avoided as far as possible. It was suggested that some performance indicators rated as amber should be examined in service areas where there were no red indicators. Mr Whiting thanked David Smith (Director of Economic Development) and his team in achieving a green rating for KPIs set out on pages 78-79 of the report.
- (3) Mark Scrivener (Corporate Risk Manager) said that the coronavirus had had a profound impact on the environment in which the authority was operating. Although the authority had responded to immediate risks and pressures, it

would be necessary, as part of the planning for longer term recovery, to consider the impact of the virus on the corporate risk profile. As part of the detailed reworking of the Corporate Risk Register, existing mitigations were being reviewed for their continued relevance and urgency, and new mitigations introduced, which would be summarised in the Quarter 1 2020/2021 Quarterly Performance Report in September 2020.

- (4) Resolved to note the Quarter 4 Performance Report.

#### **149. Highway Flooding & Storm Response**

*(Item 9)*

- (1) Mr Payne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) introduce the report which summarised Kent County Council's operational response to the exceptional rainfall and storms experienced between December 2019 and February 2020. He referred to the prolonged winter rain and its impact on residents as well as pressure created on the Highways budget which was outlined in paragraph 5.2 of the report. He also thanked Earl Bourner (Drainage Asset Manager) and his team for their response to local flooding incidents.
- (2) Simon Jones (Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste) said that February 2020 had been the wettest on record and there had been numerous severe weather events in 2019/20 which had a significant impact upon Kent residents and communities. While the Highways service had responded well to residents' requests for assistance, it was also important to understand the challenge of changed weather patterns going forward and the preventative work underway to mitigate their impact. This preventative work included the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) as well as work with land managers to mitigate run-off from agricultural and other land in rural areas.
- (3) Mr Gough reiterated Mr Payne's thanks to the Highways staff and said he had received positive feedback regarding the authority's response to localised flooding from residents. Miss Carey referred to the water garden in Folkestone and the SUDS in Tenterden, which had been integrated into the landscaping of a new housing development.
- (4) Max Tant (Flood and Water Manager) provided further detailed information about integrated solutions that delivered multiple benefits such as reducing water run-off from third party land, supporting sustainable land practice, and contributing to the quality of the environment. He said work was underway with partners across the county, particularly in relation to SUDS on new developments, and with land managers.
- (5) Several members thanked Earl Bourner and his team for their response to incidents of localised flooding and supported the work underway to mitigate flooding.
- (6) Resolved that:
  - (a) the impact of the storms and Kent County Council's immediate operational response be noted

(b) a further report outlining the wide range of options for flood mitigation plans and proposals be brought to a meeting of this Cabinet in the early autumn.