

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held online on Monday, 9 November 2020.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Hotson

IN ATTENDANCE: Amanda Beer (Corporate Director People and Communications), Matt Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education) and Christina Starte (Head of Customer Service)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

178. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

There were no apologies for absence.

179. Declaration of Interests by Member in Items on the Agenda for this meeting

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

180. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

- (1) Mrs Bell reported that KCC was supporting a new urgent campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse and signposting to help and support. Over 2 million people a year in England and Wales experience domestic abuse and 14% of children and people under the age of 18 will have lived with it at some point.

It was reported that domestic abuse had a negative effect on businesses, forced employees to take unplanned time off work and decreased productivity. It cost UK businesses almost £2 billion a year.

Lockdown had heightened the risk to victims and Kent Police saw a 12% increase in domestic abuse crime reports between March and July 2020. KCC had been working with multi agency partners to ensure a coordinated and widespread support structure was available. The campaign was called, "Domestic Abuse - it's everybody's business". A programme of free events had been organised by Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service.

KCC was backing a winter campaign called 'Knock and Check', which was asking residents to help the most vulnerable during winter months. This tied in with the select committee on social isolation which had made recommendations including

raising awareness of social isolation and loneliness. The details of the campaign were available at: KentCF.org.uk/knockandcheck

The Kent Together contact line callers would be doing contact tracing calls, following GDPR training and liaison with the districts. Advisors would establish contacts, give advice on isolation and testing, signpost and upload details to national contact tracing system.

- (2) Mrs Chandler reported that work had continued in response to the Written Statement of Action relating to special educational needs and disabilities. The quarterly monitoring meeting took place on 16 October and was very positive. The Department for Education had acknowledged improvements across the programme, in particular improvement on relationships on “Kent Parents and Carers Together” and partnership working across all stakeholders.

Key projects with health partners had been reinitiated following the first wave of the pandemic and the local offer has been upgraded with a new ‘local offer’ team.

It was reported that school engagement had improved. A countywide discussion around inclusion had been initiated with engagement from over 120 schools shaping a new vision for inclusivity for children with special educational needs. Significant resource and effort had been put into the timeliness of the issuing of Education, Health and Care Plans. The backlog was reduced and it was anticipated that this would be cleared by spring 2021.

The new SEND strategy had been drafted and was due to go out to public consultation at end of November.

KCC held a virtual ceremony for Kent Foster Carer Awards, which recognises the inspirational work done by those working with fostered children helping them to reach independence. A record 149 nominations had been received and the nominations were open to others such as social workers, nurses and teachers, in addition to foster carers.

There was a virtual launch for the Adoption Partnership South East which was formed in response to a government mandate that all local authorities must join a regional adoption agency by 2020.

Last year, the corporate parenting team brought Christmas to care leavers, by distributing gifts. The aim for Christmas 2020 was to raise £10,000 in order to fund £5 gifts for all care leavers and Members were encouraged to be generous with their donations.

- (3) Mr Long reported that KCC had implemented its free school meals scheme, through a helpline and webpage to provide vouchers to eligible families over half term. This was done at very short notice by working with partners and they were able to reach out to those the scheme was intended to help and approximately 20,000 £15 vouchers, redeemable at Asda or Tesco, were issued to families. The Kent Together webpage and helpline was open for those struggling during pandemic.

The Kent Test dates went ahead as planned but for those who were not able to sit tests due to Covid-19, further sessions were arranged to ensure all registered applicants could be tested.

Thanks were given to the Fair Access Team.

- (4) Mr Payne reported that there was a trial of electric scooters in Canterbury as part of the Department for Transport national trial. A dedicated route for the electric scooters with geo fencing was being tested in conjunction with a rental company, linking the university with the city.

Work had continued to deliver the Inland Border Facility at Sevington for HMRC and others. Work on site was on course but weather dependent. The site would be used for HGVs and HMRC would be on site from 1 January 2021.

The sweeps at the windmill at Chillenden had turned using wind power for the first time since 1949.

Thanks were given to all Kent Highways staff who continue to work as key workers during lockdown.

- (5) Miss Carey congratulated KCC's waste management team for the smooth handover from the previous contractors to FCC at 12 of the 18 household waste recycling centres. This was a major piece of work with one contract expiring on 31 October and the new contractor starting on 1 November.

All 18 centres were open during the second lockdown with the booking system being operational on each site, allowing up to 4 bookings per household per month but it was considered that this limit could be lifted as few people were making multiple visits.

It was reported that one of the Environment Team's projects had been chosen as sustainable energy project of the year by the Business Green Leaders Awards. This project led by KCC was for solar panels for Northfleet School for Girls and involved pupils from the school. It was delivered by Kent company, SAS Energy and funded with a Salix loan. The team had helped with over a hundred projects at Kent schools, with the most recent at the Wyvern School in Ashford.

KCC was hosting the first 'Plan Bee' conference to launch the pollinator strategy on 16 November. On 27 November, Lord Deben, chairman of the independent Committee on Climate Change was to formally launch the low emission strategy at the Kent Environment Strategy Conference, also being held online.

- (6) Mr Hill reported on community services during the second lockdown. Kent's public rights of way network and country parks were to stay open and the community warden service would remain operational. Registrations of deaths would continue over the telephone and registrations of birth were to be face-to-face, conducted in a Covid secure manner. Ceremonies were to continue for those with terminal conditions. Citizenship ceremonies would recommence in a Covid secure way.

Libraries were operating a 'select and collect' service and one hour PC use slots were available at 13 Covid secure libraries, with other libraries closed to the public. It

was planned to roll out the same service offer at 14 more libraries. Work was being done to open other libraries as soon as possible.

Home library services would continue and befriending telephone calls were being reinstated. Mobile library services would continue on a 'select and collect' basis as would postal loans for the blind and partially sighted. Digital and remote services would also continue but the archives would be closed during lockdown.

- (7) Mrs Prendergast reported that the Kent Together helpline was still open, working closely with partners and a wide range of help was available. Access to help was available via the website or helpline.

More than 2000 responses to the Budget Consultation had been received since it had opened on 14 October. The consultation was open until 24 November and encouragement was given to everyone to respond.

A second staff survey was conducted and the results were to be shared with staff and new ways of supporting staff explored. Thanks were given to staff for their excellent work and the services they provide to residents.

- (8) Mr Oakford expressed his pleasure to see and hear residents responding to the Budget Consultation and that already there were more responses than last year's total. The consultation was showing there was support for the Council's transformation programme, more focussed workplace hubs and better use of technology.

The Chancellor had announced that the furlough scheme was being extended until March 2021 and this was welcomed as good news for the Budget as it impacted the employment of Kent's residents. Lobbying of government on the impact of this issue was to continue.

The second round of Covid restrictions had an impact on the number of buildings KCC was able to operate from. Thanks were expressed to the staff who continued to deliver an outstanding service to the residents of Kent during difficult times without the normal facilities.

- (9) Mr Gough noted the strong response to the Budget Consultation, which was considered important given the scale of the issues which needed to be addressed. Mr Gough also wished to highlight that Mrs Chandler's comments on the work and progress on SEND were also very important.

There had been reports over the weekend concerning the government's proposed measures for Christmas and families experiencing poverty and hardship. KCC awaited further details of the proposed measures. It was planned that this would enable KCC to build on the work done in half term to support those families.

181. Covid-19 - Public Health Update (presentation)

(Item 5)

(Andrew Scott-Clark, Director of Public Health and Jo Allen, Communications Partner, were in attendance for this item)

- (1) Mr Scott-Clark reported a steady upswing in cases of Covid-19 since 20 September in Kent. The rate had been relatively low in Kent until that time and it was thought that Kent was around 4 weeks behind the average rate for England and therefore, it was felt that the second lockdown would reduce social contact, which was felt to be driving the pandemic. The national data up to 2 November 2020, showed a differential pattern across Kent, with a large upswing in Thanet and Swale districts.

In September and early October, the statistics for some boroughs had been affected by students who had tested positive for Covid-19 and then these cases had been assigned back to students' home GP surgeries. Cases were increasing in the working population but there were concerns regarding protecting the older population. There had been greater upswings in cases in the older population in Swale, Gravesham and Dartford.

Work was being done by Public Health to manage outbreaks in schools, care settings and workplaces, including some of the county's hospital trusts. It was reported that Medway NHS Foundation Trust had experienced some issues over the previous weekend and other Trusts had seen an upswing but so far, it had not impacted on their functioning.

The number of cases in Kent was comparable to other areas in the south east and there were fewer cases in Kent than other areas in England like Leicester or parts of Wales.

Work was being done with Public Health England and NHS to manage outbreaks in vulnerable settings as well as work with other partners around enforcement of restrictions.

Developing the local "Test and Trace" system had some initial issues, but these had been resolved and the next step was to get onto the national system. KCC was working with Department of Health and Social Care around coming out of lockdown and making sure testing and systems were in place going forward.

Congratulations were given to the Communications Team who had worked hard with district and NHS partners to ensure joined up communications messages.

- (2) Ms Allen reported that the "Protect Kent and Medway" campaign had localised national messages and was developed with Medway Council, the NHS, district and borough councils. It also had given Public Health colleagues a brand through which they could talk to the public.

As part of the campaign, a website section had been created which had over 40,000 page views as the public were looking for trusted information and advice, as well as looking for service updates and numbers of cases on the website.

Social media posts had been used to get messages out to target audiences. The public were not only accessing these posts but were re-sharing them. There was a lot of engagement with the social media posts and the public wanted to have conversations about what was happening in their local areas. The key messages around the pandemic had changed and the media had played an important part in sharing messages.

Campaign messages were adapted for key audiences such as younger people, black and ethnic minority communities and families with young children. Messages were also adapted for key events in the year. Materials were provided in toolkits for services to get message out 'offline' and so local knowledge can be used to get messages out.

The focus had moved to supporting the central government messages for the second lockdown but the work around tiers in different areas and 'Protect Kent and Medway' was continuing.

In response to the presentations, the following points were noted:

- The situation in regard to numbers of cases of Covid-19 was evolving and moving quite sharply. It was noted that fluctuations locally had been affected by outbreaks in institutional settings or clusters of people in residential settings but moving forward, other factors such as people socialising would impact figures. It was hoped during the second lockdown, areas of work like 'Test and Trace' could be brought forward.
- Thanks were given to Mr Scott-Clark and his team. It was recognised that they had worked tirelessly since the start of the pandemic. Thanks were also given to Communications for their efforts.

182. Covid-19 - Economic Update (presentation)

(Item 6)

(Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport, and David Smith, Director of Economic Development, were in attendance for this item)

- (1) Mike Whiting reported that KCC had responded to support business and employment.

Covid-19 had multi-faceted impacts and these impacts were considered likely to persist. A survey conducted by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce showed that more than half of businesses felt that their ability to trade as viable entities had been put under threat. There had been fall in output in Kent between March and May 2020 worth an estimated £2.3 billion. Some sectors, such as hospitality were hardest hit during the first lockdown. The continuation of people working from home and decline in public transport use had all had a wider impact on local supply chains and economies.

It was anticipated that there would be a 12% loss of GDP in 2021. Despite the introduction of the furlough scheme, universal credit claims had trebled since March and unemployment had risen dramatically between March and September. In response, KCC and partners in Medway had taken immediate actions such as setting up a business helpline and freezing repayments on business investment loans.

The Kent & Medway Economic Partnership had developed an economic renewal and resilience plan with 5 channels of work priorities which was to be reviewed in the autumn in line with developments nationally.

- (2) Mr Smith reported that KCC had been leading the work on the Kent and Medway economic renewal and resilience plan with agreement and support with colleagues from the other local authorities, the universities and business community.

The 5 channels from the plan were outlined with measures to support businesses such as helplines, an economic dashboard and communications messages. It was agreed that the weblink for the economic dashboard would be shared. There had been a significant increase in interest in 'Locate in Kent' with 118 projects in the pipeline.

It was reported that Mr Whiting was an executive member of the Straits Committee which was planning for the new relationship with neighbouring departments in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and France and work was focussed on the key challenges following the ending of the transition arrangements for the UK's exit from the European Union.

It was also reported that the Leader was chairman of an Employment Taskforce which had been meeting with key partners to look at Kickstart Placement and Apprenticeships, skills hubs and academies. The taskforce was working to the Kent & Medway Employment Action Plan.

- (3) Ms Cooper reported that the traffic management plans were aiming to keep Kent 'open for business'. Traffic management plans were still being refined but work was being done so that 'real time' information would be available showing congestion hotspots. Work was being done with hauliers in east Kent to make sure they have their own permits so they are not caught in Operation Brock or traffic management plans. This had been extended to business in Faversham and Teynham in recognition that there were businesses there which fed into the port at Dover and Eurotunnel.

The Trading Standards Business Advice Team had been in communication with businesses with key messages around plans for departure from the EU about labelling, authorised representation, etc, and an event about food and drink exports was being held. A full report was to be brought to the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

In response to the presentations, the following points were raised:

- Excellent work had been done to support local enterprises through this time of transition. Driving future growth would be critical moving forward and Kent had seen investment in areas like the creative sectors, in life sciences and infrastructure. Wherever such investment was taking place, there would need to be opportunities for local people and the workforce.
- Highways England had agreed that the quick moveable barrier on M20 was put in place by 29 December, ready for the ending of the transition period. It was also highlighted that there was some potential for issues relating to Covid-19 and issues relating to the transition arrangements to be conflated.