

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the online on Monday, 11 January 2021.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

199. Apologies and Substitutes (Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

200. Cabinet Member Updates (Item 3)

- 1) Mrs Bell reported that symptom-free Covid-19 testing had started at 12 sites across districts in Kent. KCC's Chairman, Mr Gibbens, had been one of the first to book at the testing site at Sidney Cooper Gallery in Canterbury and was interviewed by BBC Radio Kent during the test. The Armed Forces assisted KCC in setting up the testing site. Further testing sites were to open so that there would be 2 in each district by the end of January 2021.

The total number of tests conducted to 8 January 2021 was 41083 of which 450 were positive, meaning that those people could isolate and reduce their risk of transmission to others. Bookings were available on the KCC website and bookings would also be available via a dedicated telephone line.

Adult Social Care had continued to work closely with the hospital trusts and social care providers on discharges from hospital. There were a number of designated beds in care homes available for adults of any age who were Covid-19 positive and leaving hospital.

The Kent and Medway CCG website had up to date information on the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. More hospital hubs, primary care services and large vaccination centres were to open and services were to take vaccinations out to care homes and to the housebound.

- 2) Mrs Chandler said despite unprecedented pressures on the Social Work Team, all families with an assigned Social Worker had been contacted to ensure that families continued to receive the correct level of support and assistance. KCC had continued to ensure that all families were provided for through the help and support of the Social Work Team.

KCC had only received 6 new Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) over the festive period which was considerably lower than previous years. However, this was a result of the closed border to France.

Covid-19 testing was being conducted at reception centres which had helped to reduce the number of UASC kept in quarantine and had allowed for a speedier transition.

There had been a reduction in the number of UASC as a large cohort transitioned to Care Leavers on 1 January 2021.

- 3) Mr Long said the rapidly changing guidance to schools from the Department for Education to the evolving Covid emergency had required Education officers to work through Christmas to provide much needed advice and support to Kent schools. All mainstream primary and secondary schools were to remain closed to all except the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units were to remain open to all pupils as these fall within the vulnerable category. A school survey revealed that there were 5162 vulnerable children and 16,340 critical worker children and it was expected that the numbers would rise. The definition of vulnerable includes those without adequate access to online learning, and this was also starting to have an impact.

Early Years Settings, in line with government guidance, remained open to all pupils and had 13,899 in attendance which had dropped from the attendance level in December which was just over 27,000. Childminder numbers however remained stable. Funding issues needed to be resolved by Government, and this was being pursued by KCC.

Schools had a statutory duty to deliver remote learning with the minimum criteria set by government. There was a mix of both live and recorded teaching sessions as well as set time to complete tasks and assignments independently. KCC were providing advice and support to schools to ensure that they delivered the best education possible in the circumstances. Ofsted were to inspect schools where there were significant concerns about safeguarding or the quality of remote learning.

Secondary schools were to prioritise home learning to exam year groups and other year groups would be included as resources allowed.

KCC distributed laptops and tablets to all our children in care. The DfE had provided 3563 devices and 502 4G routers to Kent and these were deployed to all children with a social worker and vulnerable Year 10 children within maintained schools. Academies had their own allocation. The DfE aimed to deliver 1million devices by the end of the academic year.

Secondary and Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units had started to receive their test kits, and some had started to use these to test staff and pupils who are attending site.

Government had announced that exams will be cancelled this year and Ofqual (The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) would be consulting to determine the best way forward.

- 4) Mr Payne said the messages around transition and exports via Dover and Eurotunnel were well recognised but were worth repeating. HGVs needed to have a Kent Access Permit before coming into Kent and proceeding to the ports. Similarly, the French government had insisted on Covid-19 testing ahead of journeys taking place.

Due to further lockdown restrictions Highways site meetings were not taking place with third parties and all communications were to take place via telephone, email or post. Customer enquiries would still be dealt with but the timescales for response could be longer. Kent Highways continued to operate.

Direct debits for collection of KCC Travel Saver and Travel Saver Plus cards had been suspended for January and February and would be reviewed in March 2021.

Enforcement of HGV fly parking around the county's channel ports came into force. Information had been given to the haulage community and it was hoped that there would be an improvement for residents.

- 5) Miss Carey said that all 18 waste and recycling centres were open 7 days a week, with slots being booked online or by telephone up to a month in advance. Around 60% of slots were being taken but there was variation in use between sites. It was not considered that restrictions of the number of visits were necessary as it was reported that there was plenty of space between vehicles and careful cleaning was taking place between slots.

Waste transfer stations which processed kerbside collections from districts were operating under extended hours, in order to deal with the extra volume of waste from households over the Christmas period as well as staffing issues for district councils and traffic issues due to the end of EU transition period.

KCC was to host an interactive online conference on the theme of reducing carbon emissions in existing homes. The conference was due to take place on 3 consecutive mornings from 26 January 2021 and would cover best practice in retrofitting energy efficiency measures.

- 6) Mr Whiting said that work was being done with Locate in Kent to try to ensure Kent was not left out of the Government's levelling up agenda. Kent had a number of areas of high deprivation, and it was considered important for the Government to recognise this when relocating departments out of London to other parts of the country.

The London Resort had submitted its application for a Direct Consent Order, or DCO, to Government. KCC was supportive of this huge project, which had the potential for massive economic benefit to Kent. However, there were specific areas of concern including transport and environmental matters. Work would continue with the development company and KCC was to make a formal submission to the DCO.

The Kent and Medway Growth Hub helpline had seen an increase in calls. Intelligence was used to help inform government of the issues businesses were having in Kent. Hospitality remained the most affected sector.

The Growth Hub also reported that its conversations with businesses suggested many firms had stockpiled or deferred their orders to avoid any potential issues with transporting goods across the channel post-transition. There was an expectation that cross-channel traffic would start to increase as those stockpiles reduced and businesses started to better understand the new customs clearance arrangements,

The Rural Sector had been hit by the Covid pandemic and the extreme weather conditions in the past year. DEFRA reported a sharp drop in agricultural contribution to the UK economy, which was down by some 10% overall, with crop outputs down by one-fifth. The outcomes of the KCC Scrutiny Committee's Short Focused Inquiry into the Farming Economy were awaited.

KCC's inaugural Infrastructure Funding Statement was live on kent.gov.uk. It was a summary of all financial and non-financial developer contributions that KCC had been involved with over the course of the financial year. The statement included information on Section 106, legal agreements under the Community Infrastructure Levy, examples of infrastructure projects delivered and planned. Provision of good infrastructure was considered key to unlocking Kent's potential, and the annual statement showed how the monies received were being spent to deliver that infrastructure.

- 7) Mr Hill said that the latest lockdown had not changed the position for Community Services from Tier 4 restrictions. Parks, as well as car parks, play areas and toilets were open. There had been heavy usage of Public Rights of Way which had resulted in wear and tear in the wet weather conditions.

Libraries were to continue to provide full digital services and would be offering a click and collect book service from 33 open libraries for 2.5 days a week. The public computer provision remained suspended for staff safety reasons. Mobile Library Service 'select and collect' was to continue as would the Home Library Service, Prison Library Service and the postal loan service for the blind and partially sighted.

Registration of deaths via the telephone was to continue and there had been an increased workload with more deaths registered. Birth registrations were paused while staff focus on death registration, except for in emergencies. This was to be kept under review.

Wedding ceremonies were suspended during lockdown except for in exceptional circumstances.

KCC had to 'stand up' the Aylesford Temporary Place of Rest because of the pressure on mortuary facilities across the county. The urgent requirement only emerged on 30th December and despite it being the Christmas period with many contractors away, KCC was able to stand up Aylesford in 48 hours to make it operational by 2pm on New Year's Day. This was a herculean effort by partners in KCC and the KRF to bring forward in hours a facility which normally would take weeks to commission.

Trading Standards were taking on increased enforcement action as a result of lockdown, working with Kent Police. This was expected to continue and it was anticipated that when there was full resumption of freight traffic across the channel, there could be a shortage of trained Trading Standards officers. These were difficult to recruit and needed time to train.

- 8) Mrs Prendergast said that an e-newsletter had been sent to residents and organisations. The e-newsletter gave information on lockdown and support available, the latest on Test and Trace, regulations for people and freight travelling to the EU and details of the draft Budget. Kent Communications were emphasising crucial actions relating to the pandemic such as symptom free testing.

There was continuous review of health & safety, HR policies and guidance so that staff could continue to work safely, providing vital support to residents and service users.

- 9) Mr Oakford said that the draft Budget was published on 6 January 2021 and it was felt that it was a sound and balanced budget. KCC had received a generous financial settlement from central government and had been able to improve the financial resilience of Council. However, savings would still need to be achieved in the coming year and the Council would need to deal with the incremental pressures and impact on both Adults and Children's Services from the pandemic.

The Property Team had received notice before Christmas regarding the set up of 24 mass testing sites in Kent. Outstanding work was done over the Christmas period to identify and prepare sites, and persuading contractors to work. 12 of 24 sites were operational, with the remainder due to open imminently.

Thanks were given to Democratic Services, who had managed to keep the Council running through an extremely busy time. Thanks were given to all KCC staff who had worked over the Christmas period.

- 10) Mr Gough said that there had been extraordinary challenges for KCC in the Christmas period. There had been a sudden and major impact on Kent's highways with French authorities stopping travel across the Channel due to concerns around the new strain of Covid. Urgent support was required for those affected, both those who were not able to travel and communities in Kent. Organisations within the Council, Kent Resilience Forum, as well as private companies, voluntary organisations and community groups had responded and this work was acknowledged. Work was being undertaken to minimise any future disruption.

201. Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2021-25

(Item 4)

David Adams (Interim Director for Education) was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Long introduced the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education 2021-25 and advised that this was a 'living' document which sought to raise education standards whilst supporting what parents wanted for children's education.

- 2) Mr Adams highlighted the key issues from the Plan. Work was being undertaken to deliver school places for September 2021, with the impact of the pandemic.
- 3) There were significant challenges presented by a lack of information from central government about funding. It was reported that there was normally a 3 year rolling programme of funding but this had been delayed.
- 4) There was continuing engagement and dialogue with the Department for Education around funding issues, demographic growth and school expansions.
- 5) In response to questions and comments, it was noted that:
 - A greater proportion of school age children were being given Education, Health and Care plans than in many other authorities and a high proportion were attending special schools but work was underway to ensure in future a greater number could be supported within mainstream education.
 - There had been challenges for the early years sector due to the pandemic and the way that providers had been funded based on headcount. KCC was lobbying the Department for Education to change the funding position.
 - In most districts, there was a deficiency of selective school places and as set out in the Commissioning Plan, further schemes were being worked on to produce temporary capacity.
- 6) Resolved that the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education 2021-25 be approved.

202. Kent & Medway Employment Task Force update - Kickstart & Apprenticeships in Kent (presentation)

(Item 5)

Michelle Flegg, Workforce Development Strategy Manager was in attendance for this item.

- 1) The Leader introduced the update as the Chairman of Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce. The Taskforce included representatives from schools, universities, further education colleges, representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions, as well as representatives from the business community. The Taskforce coordinated work to respond to the employment crisis and pressures arising from the pandemic.
- 2) Ms Flegg updated Members on work being done in relation to Kickstart and Apprenticeships in Kent. The economic impact of the pandemic was greatest for young people and partnership work with other employers would help to mitigate the effects and provide opportunities for young people.
- 3) The apprenticeship levy had been introduced in 2017 and KCC contributions equated to approximately £2.1million per year. All public sector employers were subject to a target requiring the creation of apprenticeship training opportunities for new and existing staff to the value of 2.3% of headcount.

- 4) There were different levels of apprenticeship training across many disciplines at KCC, including a social work degree programme for existing members of staff.
- 5) Since 2019, all levy paying employers have been able to share a proportion of their levy with other employers to support apprenticeship training. There was a virtual event planned for February 2021 to raise awareness of the benefits, mechanisms for sharing the levy and to consider the design of a collaborative approach.
- 6) Kickstart Gateways were being established to support employers able to offer less than 30 apprenticeship placements. Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Dover Chamber of Commerce, CXK Ltd, Sevenoaks District Council and Gravesham Borough Council were approved Kickstart Gateways. KCC was applying for Kickstart Gateway status via the Education People.
- 7) The government's new Kickstart scheme was to create 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who were on Universal Credit and were deemed at risk of long term unemployment. The scheme placements aimed to develop the skills and experience of the participants. The scheme was to create new roles and was not to replace existing or planned vacancies. KCC had agreements from the DWP for 50 placement opportunities, with an option for this to be increased.
- 8) In response to questions, it was noted:
 - Work was being done to raise awareness around skills that would be needed by the workforce going into the future, such as digital skills. Green energy and retrofitting related jobs would be considered by the Task Force. Education partners were involved with the Task Force and were making sure young people were being skilled for future employment.
 - KCC was committed as an employer, as a Gateway and also playing a wider role in supporting others with Kickstart and apprenticeships.
- 9) Resolved that the Kent & Medway Taskforce update on Kickstart & Apprenticeships in Kent be noted.