

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the online on Monday, 25 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

#### **203. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 1)*

No apologies for absence were received.

#### **204. Cabinet Member Updates**

*(Item 3)*

1) Mrs Bell said the latest data report on the NHS Vaccination programme in Kent and Medway had been published showing data up until 17 January 2021. 50,000 people aged over 80 and almost 58,000 under 80 years old had been given their first dose of the Covi-19 vaccination. A further 20,000 people had received a second dose of the vaccination. In total, 127,823 doses had been administered across the county by 17 January 2021.

Services for 41 Primary Care Networks covering 197 of 200 GP practices had started administering the Covid-19 vaccine. The Clinical Commissioning Group was working with the Primary Care Networks to see how the vaccination could be distributed to more sites and to address areas where travel distance to a vaccination site was more than 10 miles. Large vaccination centres and pharmacy-based services were being developed to increase capacity.

The CCG was working to meet the government's target of vaccinations being rolled out to the top 4 priority groups by mid-February. Where services started later in parts of the county, the CCG was working on plans to provide the capacity needed. In Sandwich, Deal and Dover, vaccinations were being delivered by the neighbouring Primary Care Network from the Dover Health Centre Site. The PCN had been in a later wave of vaccination sites approved to start but first supplies of the vaccination were received on 14 January and the vaccination service began on 15 January 2021. To support catching up on priority groups, all Sandwich residents aged over 80 years old were being contacted to invite them to an additional vaccination service running from Broadstairs.

In Romney Marsh, the vaccination site at Lydd Airport had opened and KCC was providing support with transport for the centre. Mr Hills had been active alongside the Romney Marsh Day Centre, the local Community Warden and many volunteers acting as drivers and marshals to assist in running the vaccination centre.

Other Members had been involved directly in the delivery of the vaccination in their local areas, including Mr Butler, Ms Morton and others. Thanks were given to Members for their assistance.

There were 332 older people's care homes in Kent and Medway and 237 homes had been vaccinated. A further 57 were due to be vaccinated within the week. Some homes could not be fully vaccinated whilst there was an outbreak within the setting.

The Minister for Social Care had written to local authorities setting out tasks to be carried out with the Care Quality Commission and NHS partners to help community-based care staff to get vaccinated. This included identifying providers of social care services and the number of eligible frontline social care workers employed and to ensure that employers received the appropriate national and local vaccination communications. The Adult Social Care team had complied with all recommendations and continued to work with providers to support staff to get the vaccine.

Symptom-free testing sites were to open in Herne and Gravesend, bringing the number of symptom-free testing centres to 24. Booking was available for all centres on [Kent.gov.uk/symptomfreetest](https://kent.gov.uk/symptomfreetest). Up to the 20 January 2021, 109,972 tests had been conducted and 1370 of these were positive, a percentage of 1.2%.

2) Mrs Chandler said the Children & Young People's Mental Health Week was to take place from 1 to 7 February. HeadStart Kent and Kent Youth County Council were working together to ensure that young people would feel supported during these difficult times and through the collaborative work with services across the county, they were coordinating an approach to help to promote the work which Kent County Council was doing, and the services available to young people.

An extension to the HeadStart Kent Social Marketing Campaign was to be launched on 1 February 2021 to coincide with Mental Health week. This burst of activity would go out across multiple platforms and to targeted audiences, particularly parents and young people. All partners were to be provided with the assets and guidance of what to share and when, and this was also to be shared with schools for use on their own social networks.

Young people working directly with HeadStart Kent and KYCC had also got involved, creating content to be shared on social media promoting tips for keeping mentally well during lockdown.

Advertising across social media and radio was also to be utilised promoting MoodSpark and Kent Resilience Hub.

Furthermore, as part of Mental Health Week, Headstart were to support Kooth in the promotion of their new campaign 'Don't do it alone.' HeadStart Kent and the Kent Clinical Commissioning Groups commissioned free support and access to fully trained online counsellors 365 days a year, and the "Don't Do It Alone" campaign was designed to encourage open conversations around mental health, so children and young people would know they were not alone with their struggles. Some of the

biggest stars on social media had also helped to support this campaign and had developed a video to appeal to young people. A summary of the support was to be circulated to Members.

During the first Covid-19 lockdown KCC helped many families with disabled children by providing toys and equipment aimed at enabling a diversion from the pressures and difficulties of being confined to home. Following its success, it was intended to run another Toy Scheme with a widened eligibility criterion to help alleviate some of the pressures felt by families whose children and young people were without their usual support network.

The scheme was to be operated by issuing retail vouchers allowing for families to identify exactly what would benefit them most.

Kent PACT, a parent carer forum set up for parents of children and young adults with disabilities and additional needs had made significant progress towards becoming its own independent, constituted group which was a significant progress in restoring confidence and increasing engagement between PACT and KCC. A funding stream had also been agreed and KCC were working with PACT to recruit a parent champion for each of the four quadrants and secure a centralised office.

On 15 January 2021, the Education Minister had launched the government's independent review on Children's Social Care Services which would change the way that services were delivered across England and the review had a wide remit. It was reported in the launch that it was to re-shape the way children interact with the care system, looking at the process from referral to becoming a looked after child. The review was welcomed by KCC and KCC was to participate fully to share recognised best practice.

There had been an increase in staff sickness as many were suffering with Covid or were in isolation, and with the rise in Covid infections, it was having an unprecedented impact on anxiety levels and staff morale as capacity within teams was diminished, creating pockets of pressure. CYPE had continued to suffer from loss of staff, and condolences were offered to all those who had lost loved ones to Covid and thoughts were with any staff who had contracted the virus.

3) Mr Long said that a letter had been sent from Gavin Williamson on 20 January 2021 and schools were informed that the daily contact testing for pupils and students would be paused whilst further evaluation work was undertaken in order to understand the impact. However, regular testing of school staff was to increase to twice weekly.

Given the further disruption to education and that there was no guarantee that all students would be able to fairly sit their exams in the summer, an alternative arrangement to award qualifications was being considered. It was not proposed that the Kent Test be cancelled. Together with Ofqual, the DfE had launched a joint consultation to seek views on alternative assessment arrangements for GCSE, AS,

and A levels and propositions for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs). The consultation launched on Friday 15 January and was to run for two weeks. Views from students, parents and carers had been invited.

The DfE were keeping plans for the return to school and college under continuous review and were to ensure that children and young people returned to face to face education as soon as was possible. The DfE were to inform schools, colleges and parents ahead of the February half term, and would take into account fully the evolving and challenging position of the spread of the virus, as well as the views from health colleagues, the Chief and Deputy Chief Medical Officers.

Deepest sympathies were offered to those who had lost someone to Covid and thoughts were with all staff who continued to do an outstanding job under the extreme pressures, whether this had been in a professional or personal capacity. Thanks were given to all the education officers.

4) Mr Payne said work continued to be done by Kent Highways and Transportation despite challenges and there had been little interruption to the works programme. The Machine Road Surfacing contract was underway. Work was continuing with the backdrop of keeping social distancing measures and therefore, site visits were not taking place. Many traffic counts were not being undertaken as distorted traffic flows meant that collection of meaningful data was not always possible. Thanks were given to Kent Highways staff.

Extra resources had been stationed in Sandwich to deal with the winter weather. Gritting was important in ensuring access to Manston and to the Sevington inland border facility, as well as to vaccination sites.

5) Miss Carey thanked KCC staff, partners and contractors for their efforts in a difficult period. KCC Waste Transfer Stations had been operating extra opening hours to help district partners with their work of collecting kerbside waste. A decision had just been published on waste performance payments for Canterbury City Council and Thanet District Council. This meant that there were agreements with all four of the east Kent councils on recycling which incentivised improved recycling rates. There were shared benefits of reduced cost and extra income for all partners and it was an area where everyone wanted to see improvement to meet environmental goals.

The Low Carbon Homes Conference was being hosted by KCC online from 26 January 2021. As well as the target of net zero carbon for KCC services and buildings by 2030, there was a linked commitment to reaching net zero for Kent as a whole by 2050.

Carbon emissions in Kent had fallen by 40% between 2005 and 2018 but considerable work was needed to reach net zero by 2050. Over the next 30 years, it was anticipated that most greenhouse gases emitted in Kent would come from existing buildings so the focus of the Conference would be on retrofitting. Nearly 200 people had registered and it was hoped that the Conference would help to identify where progress could be accelerated.

6) Mr Whiting said thanks to staff at KCC but also to colleagues in the districts and boroughs for their work during the pandemic assisting with business grants.

Kent Ambassadors had been briefed on various aspects of the post-Brexit reality in Kent. He had introduced two Straits Committee Colleagues, Bruno Ficheux, Vice President of the Department of Nord; and Mireille Hingrez-Cereda, Vice-President of the Department of Pas-de-Calais, who gave their perspective from the other side of the Channel. Kent Ambassadors had said how interesting they found the session, and they were particularly grateful to French partners for their insight.

The Broadband team, headed by Liz Harrison, continued to work with BDUK to roll out gigabit broadband to communities in Kent. Briefings had been sent to Members and to Members of Parliament regarding the BDUK and KCC Vouchers schemes. Briefings for District and Borough Councils were being set up to assist them with their understanding of the roll-out and the voucher schemes.

The Marsh Millions, a fund of £1m set up with funding from Magnox/NDA, KCC, Folkestone & Hythe District Council and Ashford Borough Council had been used to successfully create and sustain employment in the Romney Marsh area. The legal agreement under which the fund operated had expired and the four co-funders had met and formally agreed to wind-up the scheme to new applicants. A decision was going through KCC's internal governance processes.

In response to the Covid emergency and first lock down in March last year, the Marsh Millions co-funders agreed to a 12-month repayment holiday for companies that had taken out loans from the scheme. It had been agreed that period may be extended on a case by case basis for a further six months for companies that continued to have difficulties in making their repayments.

KCC was to continue to manage the loan repayment process which was expected to take several years.

The Taste of Kent Awards 2021 were open for public voting. The awards were facilitated by Produced in Kent, which represented over 300 of Kent's growers, producers, manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, pubs and restaurants. The Awards were open to any food and drink business located in Kent and, in their 17th year, were the longest running and most prestigious food & drink awards in the South East. The Awards had particular importance in 2021, given the massive effect Covid had on the sector. The vote was open until the 28 February and details of the nominees and how to vote was available at: [www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk](http://www.tasteofkentawards.co.uk).

KCC had engaged with SME house builders, to discuss the important role they were to play in delivering new homes and sustaining the local supply chains and employment in Kent. The issues were further discussed at an online conference facilitated by Localis and jointly led by the Developer Groups in Kent, Essex and East Sussex.

Mr Whiting reported that he was attending the UK Building and Supply Conference, which would look at the wide range of issues affecting delivery of housing, including affordable housing.

7) Ms Prendergast said the further symptom free testing sites had been opened across Kent, increasing testing capacity to over 20,000 per day. As of 22 January,

booking analysis showed 50% of slots for the following 5 days had been filled. Kent Communications continued to promote symptom free testing across many channels including social media, radio and outdoor mobile advertising. For those residents who had already been tested, work was being done on an email or text message to remind them to book another test. Going forward, bookings would generate automatic reminders for re-testing.

Since the start of Covid-19 contact tracing and up to 21 January 2021, of 89713 cases in Kent residents, 85.1% had been successfully contacted. The NHS Test and Trace target set by the scientific advisory group for emergencies was for at least 80% to be contacted so it was encouraging that Kent was exceeding the target. As of 25 January, positive lateral flow tests would also feed into the Contact and Trace system. Additional measures including an uplift in staffing levels had been taken to address likely increase in volumes.

To help understand attitudes to the situation in regard to the pandemic, the residents' survey which sought residents' views on compliance with Covid-19 guidance and attitudes to symptom free testing had been refreshed. The survey had received over 4500 responses and was due to close on 29 January. Work was also being done with KYCC to better understand the pandemic from a youth perspective.

A well-known and well-respected Kent resident had agreed to endorse and support the "Don't be the reason" campaign, to encourage compliance with the guidelines, booking regular symptom free tests and adhering to contact tracing, if contacted. Details were being finalised and would be shared across social media platforms.

## **205. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring - November 2020-21**

*(Item 4)*

1) Mr Oakford said the report presented the position for KCC as of November 2020. The forecast revenue position excluding spending associated with schools and Covid-19, was an £11.8million underspend. This was an increase to the underspend of £7.3million since the last monitoring report. The money saved as an underspend was going to be needed for services when the lockdown was eased and children returned to schools.

2) There were building budget pressures in areas of the council such as those relating to mental health, domestic abuse and referrals to Children's Services. All directorates had reported underspends but this had not taken into account the impact of the third lockdown.

3) Underspends that had been reported relating to Adult Social Care were due to less home care client hours being commissioned through homecare but this needed to be considered alongside the additional expenditure on homecare attributed to Covid-19.

4) The available emergency grant funding was £17.4million after taking into consideration additional spending incurred, delayed savings, income losses and underspends. The social impact of the third lockdown was not yet known. The MHCLG report which totalled the Covid-19 related spend was £104million.

5) The Capital forecast showed an underspend of £179.4million.

6) Resolved that the recommendations in the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report be agreed.

**206. Capital Programme 2021-24, Revenue Budget 2021-22 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-24**

*(Item 5)*

*Zena Cooke, Corporate Director Finance and Dave Shipton, Head of Finance Policy, Planning & Strategy and Benjamin Watts, Monitoring Officer were in attendance for this item.*

1) Mr Oakford said that the scrutiny process with all KCC Members for the draft budget had been completed. The draft budget had been presented at all Cabinet Committees and was finalised by the full Scrutiny Committee. No formal recommendations for changes to the draft budget were received as part of this process.

2) The draft budget had been developed to reflect the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and contained an element of financial sustainability to ensure that KCC was able to support residents throughout the next financial year and beyond.

3) Mr Shipton updated Members regarding responses from the budget consultation and it was noted that there had been a significant increase in responses compared to other recent budget consultations. An overview of the key issues raised at Cabinet Committees and at Scrutiny Committee was given but no changes were formally recommended.

4) The government's expectation is that an increasing proportion of KCC's core spending power is funded from council tax. This is reflected in the amount of council's core spending funded from council tax has increased from 61% in 2015-2016 to 72.8% for 2021/2022 settlement. The 2021/2022 amount is based on the government's estimate for council tax base growth and council tax charge increases although we now have evidence that the tax base for 2021/2022 will be less than the government's estimate and consequently the increase in the 2021/2022 budget will be less than the increase assumed in the government's core spending power illustration.

5) Measures were proposed to strengthen KCC's financial resilience within 2021-22 budget but it was not known what the final outturn was for 2020-21.

6) Ms Cooke said that work had been done since the budget amendment agreed in September 2020 and it was hoped there would be an underspend at the end of the financial year to support the 2021-22 budget. There was a high level of risk, particularly in areas like Adult Social Care and Children's Services where demand had been suppressed during lockdown restrictions.

7) Mr Watts said that queries that had been raised around the format of the budget provided to Members at Scrutiny Committee would be answered and Members of Cabinet copied into the response.

8) Miss Carey said that KCC's spending power should be coming more from council tax as it was more reliable than investments and government grants and it was a strength that more of KCC's core spending power was coming directly from Kent residents.

9) Ms Chandler said there was emphasis in the draft budget around the work on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and this had been noted by the Department for Education.

10) Mr Whiting said that he would have liked to have seen more going into reserves but felt it was a balanced and prudent budget.

11) The Leader said that some Members sitting on Cabinet Committees had raised concerns as part of the budget consultation that there was too much emphasis on income from council tax and others had queried whether enough was being done to increase reserves. A balance was found to ensure KCC was prepared for the coming year.

12) Resolved that the briefing and consultation responses in the report be noted and the Capital Programme 2021-24, Revenue Budget 2021-22 and Medium term Financial Plan 2021-24 be endorsed.

## **207. Decision 21/00011 - Kent Rail Strategy**

*(Item 6)*

*Stephen Gasche, Rail Project Manager was in attendance for this item.*

1) The Leader said the decision to adopt the Kent Rail Strategy had been recorded at previous Cabinet Committee meetings and was stated on the relevant consultation pages on KCC's website. Members of the public had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategy. However, the notice of decision was not published on the list of Forthcoming Executive Decisions for the normal 28 days in advance of the meeting of Cabinet. This was an oversight due to a minor administrative error. The decision was therefore to be recorded as urgent but it was noted that the minimum 5 clear working day notice was provided.

2) Mr Payne said that the new strategy was in response to the Williams Rail Review which had highlighted the failure of the existing franchise system. The Kent Rail Strategy flagged up expectations around the train service and rolling stock specifications required moving forward. The need for additional capacity on high speed, mainline and metro services had been highlighted. The strategy was aligned with the Kent and Medway growth and infrastructure framework forecasts and with the success of the current local transport plan. The strategy sought to promote greater integration in line with transport for the south east around better east-to-west connectivity.

3) Mr Gasche outlined the report regarding the Kent Rail Strategy 2021. There had been some amendments which had been recommended by the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee and feedback had been considered from the public consultation. There was also a Rail Summit webinar with over 100 participants which also contributed to consultation.

4) Mr Gasche advised that the key outcome was the provision of a Thameslink service from Maidstone East to London, initially to Blackfriars and in due time, to St Pancras and on to Cambridge. This had overwhelming support from stakeholders across mid-Kent.

5) The Leader said that the Kent Rail Strategy was to replace the Rail Action Plan produced in 2011.

6) Resolved to adopt the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 as the Council's rail policy.

## **208. Learning Loss and Support to Schools**

*(Item 7)*

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

1) Mr Long introduced the report regarding learning loss and support to schools. As a consequence of the pandemic, there had been a loss of learning for children and work was being done to support schools to respond and recover.

2) Mr Adams said schools were to put in place arrangements to support children and to cover their learning loss. Support was to be given to schools in terms of materials and staff training, helping schools to identify needs and target resources.

3) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:

- It would be difficult to know how successful KCC's input had been in the recovery of learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic but school level data would inform KCC moving forward. The data was also affected by the disruption but The Education People were assisting schools in this regard.
- It was likely that there would be an increase in the number of deferred entries to primary school. The readiness of some children to start school had been affected as numbers of children attending nurseries had dropped. Work would need to be done with schools regarding readiness of children for primary school.
- Schools were being surveyed about how many young people were not felt to have adequate access to remote learning because of the lack of an appropriate device or lack of internet access. KCC was in contact with the Kent Association of Headteachers around messages to schools and around provision of headteacher wellbeing support.

4) Resolved to note the report.