

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the online on Monday, 15 March 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

209. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

210. Minutes of the Meetings held on 14 December 2020 and 11 January 2021

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 14 December 2020 and 11 January 2021 are correct record and that they be signed by the chairman.

211. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell provided an update regarding Covid-19 testing and vaccinations. The national booking service had been extended to people aged 55 and over which meant that vaccinations were being rolled out to the 8th group of the 9 priority vaccination groups. It was anticipated that invitations would be extended to the 9th group, those aged 50 to 54. Those who had received a vaccination in the first weeks of the programme were due to receive their second dose and it was important that people attended for their second appointments.

As of 7 March, 670,834 vaccinations had been delivered across Kent and Medway. 89% of the population aged 65 plus had at least one dose of the vaccine and therefore, the vaccination programme had been successful. However, continued testing was considered important as 1 in 3 people with the virus did not experience symptoms of Covid-19.

The symptom free testing programme was to remain place until June 2021. There were to be changes to the sites and to operating hours. On 30 March, the centres at Detling, Kemsley and Fairfield were to close. From 31 March, the centres at Sheerness and Swanscombe were to extend their hours to between 9am and 7pm. All sites were to be closed on Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday but would be open on Easter Saturday.

The Director for Public Health had recommended a change in the frequency of testing. From 15 March, those living or working in Kent were recommended to take a symptom-free test twice weekly, as this would give more accurate results and it was

important that symptom-free testing continued as the national restrictions were eased.

As of 10 March, 422,051 tests had been conducted across Kent with 2572 positive tests identified, meaning these individuals were able to isolate immediately and break the chain of transmission.

2) Mrs Chandler said that she had attended the Spirit of Try Angle Awards ceremony which had taken place virtually. The Try Angle Awards were in their 26th year; they recognised and rewarded the outstanding efforts and achievements of young people and groups. The Awards recognised the achievements of young people during particularly challenging times. The recording of the virtual awards ceremony was available on the website and Members were encouraged to watch the ceremony to hear about the young people and their achievements.

Between 20 November and 18 December 2020, local authorities were invited to submit applications for funding to support them with costs incurred as a result of caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who were care leavers during the pandemic. Submissions had been assessed and in February, confirmation was received from the Department for Education that KCC had been successful in securing £794,333 from the government's Covid-19 fund.

There had been a slow and steady rise in new UASCs since the new year and there had also been a trickle of transfers of UASCs out of Kent. Close work had continued with the Home Office to try and ensure that any potential upsurge in arrivals would not result in KCC being unable to safely accept UASCs again. Oakwood House had been vacated and returned to KCC use.

3) Mr Long said as of 8 March, schools and colleges had re-opened to all pupils with asymptomatic Covid-19 testing in place. As of 11 March, almost 90% of children were back in school. Testing was voluntary but encouraged as this would enable schools to serve pupils as safely as possible.

National Offer Day for secondary schools was on 1 March and 22,264 parents and carers, of whom over 18,000 were from Kent, applied for a place for their child at a Kent school for September 2021. This was 594 more than in 2020. Despite the increase in numbers, over 95% of Kent families were offered a place at one of the schools they had selected. Carers and parents had until 15 March to accept or refuse offers and to return waiting list forms. Parents and carers were advised to accept the offers they had received, even if they wished to appeal, as acceptance of an offer would not prejudice an appeal.

Appeals had to be logged by 26 March so that they could be heard on time and KCC would reallocate places from schools' waiting lists, sending out a second round of offers on Wednesday, 21 April 2021. After this, schools were to maintain their own waiting lists and parents and carers were able to continue to apply to school directly to ask to be placed on the waiting list.

4) Mr Payne said that Kent Highways had announced the first phase of a road re-surfacing programme worth £5million and covering 26 locations. A larger re-surfacing programme was to continue in the spring, summer and autumn months.

The Pothole Blitz campaign had been launched worth £10million, which was focussed on large and permanent pothole repairs. This followed on from a £10million campaign in 2020 where nearly 50,000 individual pothole repairs were delivered.

The Road Surface Preservation Programme, an £11million programme had been launched to extend the life of Kent's roads and prevent potholes and was to improve 125 miles of highway across the county. Specialist treatments preserved the roads for up to 8 to 10 years and extend the periods between disruptive renewal works.

Kent Highways was to publish a forward programme covering the next 5 years.

5) Miss Carey said KCC's Environment Team had been successful in securing grants totalling £20,643,013.64 for energy projects to 'de-carbonise' the KCC estates. Projects included two solar park projects, solar photovoltaic panels on KCC buildings, funding towards Maidstone heat network, heat pump projects and LEDs. This was in addition to £2,478,000 awarded for the Maidstone heat network project. The funding was 100% grant and therefore did not need to be re-paid and the only stipulation was that the funding must be spent by 30 September 2021.

KCC had 86% of the funding needed to reach Net Zero by 2030 and had reduced carbon emissions between 2010 and 2020 by 50%. The new projects would reduce them by another 40%. The projects were to reduce KCC's energy costs and the income from the energy parks was estimated to be £51million over 30 years.

25 extra slots a day had been added at all 18 household waste recycling centres. The contractors had more experience running the sites with social distancing in place and were confident that they could be operated safely with increased numbers. 58% of slots of household recycling centres across the county were taken up.

Feedback about the booking system had been positive, with 97% of users surveyed satisfied or very satisfied. The same survey found 96% of users were satisfied or very satisfied with their visit.

6) Mr Whiting said Natural England had raised issues about nitrates and phosphates in the Stour catchment area and this was holding up a number of major planning applications across east Kent. The situation had the potential to affect thousands of jobs and those involved in local supply chains for new developments. KCC was working with district colleagues, Natural England, Southern Water, developers, the Environment Agency, Homes England and others in government to produce a strategy to resolve the problem in Kent.

£90,000 had been secured from SELEP to lead a new project, the Seed Project, to help small businesses access new overseas markets over the next year.

Canterbury Christ Church University had opened its new 'STEM' facility for sciences, technology, health, engineering and medicine. KCC had played a pivotal role in securing over £16million from SELEP to invest in the project which was to be a centre for industry collaboration and education. £900,000 of additional local growth funding was awarded to the EDGE project supporting 1200 learners to enter the labour market by 2024.

7) Mr Hill said the new community centre in Southborough was to reach 'practical' completion shortly and was to be open to the public by the end of April and a formal opening was planned for June. The centre would provide council offices, community rooms, a theatre, a GP surgery, a library and provision for a local football club. Thanks were given to Mr Oakford for his contributions as part of Southborough Town Council and to the project manager, Jonathan White.

8) Mrs Prendergast said that 400 schools had taken up the offer of 'Back to School' packs produced by the Communications Team about social distancing at school gates. This was backed up with messages on social media.

An advertising campaign regarding how to get Covid-19 tests was to be promoted on mobile outdoor advertising and on the radio as well as through the website and social media channels.

Communications had continued to go out to Kent residents, businesses and others affected by the exit from EU and messages had been produced around the standing down of Manston as a site for Covid-19 testing and customs checks for hauliers.

The Census was taking place on 21 March 2021 and Communications were continuing to support the awareness campaign.

9) Mr Oakford said that KCC was in a position to re-open a large number of its buildings. Buildings would need to be made Covid-19 compliant and social distancing would apply but the budget was approved and buildings had been identified. Buildings included were: short-break units, community buildings, children's centres, youth hubs, adult education centres and libraries. It was proposed that by 1 June, a total of 150 buildings were to be re-opened and post-June, if the government policy permitted, work was to be done to open many more buildings.

212. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - January 2020-21

(Item 5)

1) Mr Oakford said the January forecast revenue position excluding schools and Covid-19, showed a £14million underspend. All directorates had continued to report underspends, with the largest in the financing items. The reported Covid-19 spending position showed an underspend of £11.8million which was compared against £72.2million of Covid-19 related budgets. Included in the Covid-19 position was £16million which had been committed for the Helping Hands scheme. It was anticipated that around £5million would be spent during the current financial year and the remaining £10million was to be spent in 2021-22.

2) The overall underspend was forecast to be £25.8million but Members were asked to note that this was an unprecedented year and this level of underspend was a 'one-off'.

3) The Capital forecast showed an underspend of £201.5million, of which £197.2million related to re-phasing and £4.3million real underspend. The forecast underspend has increased by £52.1million.

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

213. Decision 21/00035 - Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme

(Item 6)

Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director, CYPE and David Adams, Reconnect Programme Manager were in attendance for this item.

1) The Leader introduced the report advising that the programme sought to address many of the issues that had arisen for children and young people during the pandemic. The programme was being developed at pace and work was to continue during the pre-election period. It was hoped that the work could be taken forward following the election.

2) Mrs Chandler introduced a video regarding the Reconnect Programme and outlined the agenda report. She said that she shared Members' concerns about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people and core Children's Services have been working to address some of those issues. The Reconnect Programme was not an extension of core services but was about additionality and positivity. Thanks were given to the young people who had communicated that this was the emphasis they wanted for the programme and the views of children were to be at the heart of programme. Parents, carers, teachers and CYPE staff had worked on home learning for children during the pandemic but children had still missed out. The programme was to be 'universal' to all children and young people in Kent. The 5 themes for the programme were: health and happiness; friends and community; sports activities and the outdoors; and economic well-being.

All Members were to have opportunities for their input into the programme and for conversations to take place with all of the group leaders. Partnership work with charities and all local councils was part of the programme and everyone was asked to give a year to the children.

It was intended that Reconnect would run until August 2022 and there was to be a dedicated programme team led by David Adams.

3) Mr Long said that he endorsed the Reconnect Programme and hoped that all partners would cooperate to help children reconnect with learning and with their lives outside the home.

4) Mr Bird said the initiative should be welcomed by everyone in Kent as it was important for children their development. He regretted that it did not come earlier and that similar schemes had been proposed by opposition Members at an earlier stage. The Reconnect Programme was wide ranging and there was a risk that it might become difficult to manage and work needed to be done on focussing activities and looking at how best to measure their success. KCC should ensure there was provision throughout the county as it was a universal programme. Volunteers were being sought and there were concerns around provision of volunteers in areas of Kent where the need would be the greatest. It was important that there was engagement with those parents and their children who would not have normally participated and it was therefore important that work was done through schools and

other services to make sure every child was encouraged to take advantage of the scheme. School staff have had an increased workload and had faced challenges in the pandemic and resources would need to be provided to support programme.

5) Mr Dunkley said that young people had made a lot of sacrifices during the pandemic to keep other safe and the Reconnect Programme was about reconnecting them to things that they may have missed or may aspire to do. It was hoped through the project to involve everyone across Kent and KCC, as the strategic authority for children was to work with every part of the community, public sector and voluntary sector to give a year and two summers of activities for children. Children would be connected to activities through services offered directly through KCC and through schools' knowledge of their children and families. Children were to be offered a 'blended menu' of catch-up learning as well as sports and activities. This approach was welcomed by schools.

6) Mr Adams summarised the recommendations outlined in the report.

7) Mrs Prendergast thanked Communications for the film that was shown at the beginning of the agenda item.

8) The Leader said that the programme would be of lasting significance to children and young people in Kent.

9) Members agreed the recommendations as outlined in the agenda report.

214. Port of Dover Closure incident follow-up and EU Transition update *(Item 7)*

Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport and Mark Scrivener, Corporate Risk Manager were in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Scrivener introduced the report and raised the following points:

- Mr Scrivener's team had been asked to produce the report as the 'debrief' for the major incident which happened in December 2020 as they were not involved with the response.
- The report was written from the KCC perspective, although it was noted that KCC were a key part of the multi-agency response. A similar process would have been undertaken by the Local Resilience Forum.
- The views of key individuals involved with the response and those affected by the incidents had been sought as well as the views of Members.
- Detailed planning had been undertaken in the run up to the end of the EU transition period, which had helped the response but there were unique challenges presented by the incident.
- There were learning points for KCC but also involving partners.

2) Mrs Cooper raised the following points:

- Detailed work had been undertaken with Dover District Council (DDC) and Highways England on how to keep the roads clear moving forward and agreement around signage, tree removal, improving sightlines, adding maintenance bays on roundabouts in Dover and looking at the A258 Castle Hill when there was congestion in future. In the longer term, ANPR cameras on box junctions and an A2 'tap' at the Lydden traffic signals were being looked at with DDC and Highways England.
- There had been a reduction in numbers of HGVs crossing the English Channel in comparison to previous years but numbers were increasing. The French authorities had changed their requirements in regard to Covid-19 testing for HGV drivers which had reduced the amount of testing having to be carried out in Kent. Therefore, HGVs crossing the Channel would no longer be directed to the centre at Manston but the site was able to be 'stepped up' if required. There was to be an overnight closure on 20 March to change signage and configuration.
- The planned introduction of import controls had been delayed by 6 months by central government in order for businesses and traders to be prepared.
- The HMRC had moved into the Sevington Inland Border Facility and there were proposals for White Cliffs Inland Border Facility going through the planning process.
- Traffic management was being looked at with the Department for Transport moving forward as Manston would only be available until the end of June 2021. The later stages of Operation Stack had been compromised by the Sevington Inland Border Facility and therefore, close work was being undertaken on future traffic management for congestion relating to the Straits of Dover. It was hoped that sites could be found outside of the county to reduce congestion and this was to be a key project in the following months.

3) Mr Payne said since 1 January 2021, the suite of tactical options such as Manston and the Quick Moveable Barrier on the M20 had been available as planned. Continued work between KCC, DDC and the MP would ensure the risk of future incidents was minimised. Thanks were given to all those working before and after Christmas and special thanks were given to Mrs Cooper.

4) Mr Hill said the response had been fast and flexible and showed the strength of the partnerships which had been formed with the Kent Resilience Forum. Driver welfare was highlighted as an area for learning from the incident and moving forward, planning was to be done around welfare issues.

5) Mrs Chandler said that local authorities had worked to clear roadside litter following the incident but highlighted that it had been an ongoing issue and could be included as another aspect of 'Keep Dover Clear', working with DDC.

6) Mrs Prendergast said that effective communications or emergency planning was key and thanked KCC Communications for their work over Christmas.

7) The Leader said the report was a clear summary of what happened and drew together both the extraordinary scale of the challenge, the way in which the partners responded very quickly and acknowledged the areas where there were severe pressures. It was welcomed that there was a focus on keeping Dover clear. There had been detailed planning for the EU transition but KCC had not been prepared for total shutdown of both the cross-channel ports and a whole new set of requirements. Thanks were given to Mrs Cooper and all staff involved in the run up to Christmas.

Since their introduction on 1 January, there had been high levels of compliance with the Kent Access Permit. An evolving strategy was needed to deal with the changing situation and new challenges arising. The situation had been made more manageable by the approach announced by government to delay the start of the new import controls.

8) Members thanked and paid tribute to Mrs Cooper on the occasion of her retirement from KCC.

215. Quarterly Performance Report 20/21 Q3

(Item 8)

Rachel Kennard, Senior Intelligence Analyst was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Rachel Kennard outlined the report with results of 35 key performance indicators (KPIs) up to the end of December 2020. KPIs were rated red, amber or green based on the most recent performance against targets. Overall, the position was positive despite the ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic, 20 of the KPIs were 'RAG' rated as green, 11 rated as amber and 4 performing below target rated as red.
- 2) The 3 areas that had been 'RAG' rated as red in quarter 2 were the same for quarter 3 and the fourth area rated as red was under Customer Services on complaints responded to within timescale. The floor target was 80% and performance had fallen to 78% for the period September to December 2020. This was due to increased complaint numbers, increased complexity of complaints and staff availability.
- 3) The picture presented by the performance indicators reflected a positive position, particularly given the challenges faced by KCC over the period. The following were highlighted as examples:
 - The Kent.gov website had continued to be very popular in terms of visitor numbers and an increasing number of transactions were being completed online.
 - The KPIs relating to economic development covering the 'No Use Empty' Scheme and the Developer Contributions had continued to perform well and over £32 million of funding from the 'Getting Building' Fund was agreed by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

- Greenhouse gas emissions had been on a downward trend and were ahead of target.
 - The time taken for adoptions had reduced and the number of Looked After Children had been reduced.
 - The proportion of 'front door' contacts where a decision was made within 3 working days had increased.
 - In Adult Social Care, targets had been met with regard to those discharged from hospital remaining at home 91 days after discharge.
 - In Public Health, health visiting and drug and alcohol treatment continued to meet targets, despite the need to adapt services for reduced face to face contact.
- 4) Members noted that the KPIs rated red needed to be addressed but overall it was felt that the outlook presented by the KPIs was positive.
- 5) Resolved that the Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 be noted.

216. Kent Rail Strategy 2021 - update
(Item 9)

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

- 1) Mr Payne introduced the report and thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their discussion on the Kent Rail Strategy. The Scrutiny Committee's input had reinforced the importance of improving connections between Maidstone and London with the Minister of State for Transport.
- 2) Mr Gasche said that the agenda report had set out the amendments to the Kent Rail Strategy proposed by the Scrutiny Committee, which had strengthened the case for an initial service between Maidstone and Blackfriars, retaining the ambition of working towards a through-service going through Blackfriars and St Pancras to Cambridge.
- 3) Members thanked and paid tribute to Mr Gasche on the occasion of his retirement from KCC.
- 4) Resolved to note and approve the Scrutiny Committee's amendments to Kent Rail Strategy 2021.