

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Virtual on Monday, 30 November 2020.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, 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 J McInroy and Mr T Hills

IN ATTENDANCE: Jo Allen (Communications Partner), Amanda Beer (Corporate Director People and Communications), Matt Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director for Children Young People and Education), Mark Scrivener (Corporate Risk Manager and Interim Corporate Assurance Manager) and Benjamin Watts (Legal Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

183. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Miss Carey and Mr Hills attended as her representative. Mr Whiting had advised that he hoped to join the meeting, following another briefing which he needed to attend. Mr McInroy was in attendance as his representative.

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

(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

185. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 October 2020

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 are correct record and that they be signed by the chairman.

186. 'Setting the Course' - Kent County Council's Interim Strategic Plan

(Item 4)

David Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance) and Jenny Dixon-Sherreard (Policy Adviser) were in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Gough said the Interim Strategic Plan had been developed to set the priorities for KCC over the next 18 months. He said that the draft 5 Year Plan to replace the current strategic statement '*Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes*', had been postponed because of the Covid-19 crisis. The interim plan had however been informed by members' priorities and engagement with

Trade Unions as well as the public engagement and consultation undertaken for the draft five-year plan.

- (2) David Whittle said that the plan sought to set out the priorities for dealing with the immediate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the end of the EU transition arrangements as well as setting out the foundations for longer term priorities. He said that the long term priorities were largely unchanged from the draft 5 Year Plan but there was a need to understand how they might be achieved in the light of the changes to ways of working as a result of Covid-19.
- (3) Mr Whittle said that any substantive changes to the draft interim plan had to be agreed by the Cabinet and recorded in the minutes of the meeting as a designed version needed to be produced for publication with the agenda for the County Council meeting scheduled for 10 December. Mr Whittle also said that it was not intended to produce hard copies of the plan and paid tribute to Jenny Dixon-Sherreard who had co-ordinated contributions to the plan and drafted the text.
- (4) Members commented on the demand challenge identified in the plan and in particular to transport and the Local Transport Plan for Kent as well as the increased demand for services for children including increased requests for assessments that might lead to an EHCP. It was acknowledged that the spike in demand for Social Services and the Integrated Children's Services was not as big as anticipated but this needed to be fully explored and there was evidence that referrals were increasing both in terms of numbers and in complexity.
- (5) Mr Gough said that in addition to the challenges outlined in the plan, some of the macro-impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic and the lockdowns, such as changes in partnership working and the evidence that people were interested in moving out of big cities, might create some opportunities that could be exploited in the interests of the residents of Kent.
- (6) Resolved that the Interim Strategic Plan for Kent County Council be endorsed and that it be recommended to County Council for approval.

187. EU Transition Preparedness - Update

(Item 5)

- (1) Mr Gough introduced the report which provided an update on the work being undertaken by Kent County Council (KCC) internally and with local and national public agencies through the Kent Resilience Forum, to prepare for the ending of EU Transition arrangements on 31 December 2020. He referred in particular to KCC's ask of Government in relation to the enforcement of traffic regulations to keep traffic flowing, the health and safety measures to be in place at key sites and referred to the cumulative impact of measures relating to Covid-19, the end of transition arrangements and the impact of severe weather on transport and health in the county.
- (2) Barbara Cooper said the update built on the reports previously presented to the County Council in July 2018, December 2018, March 2019, September

2019, and October 2020, as well as several briefings for members and sought to update members on local resilience and preparedness, KCC's own readiness and the activities of the cross directorate resilience forum as well as the activities of KCC's Resilience and Emergency Planning Service and the cumulative impacts arising from the pandemic, EU Transition and winter pressures. She said construction works at Sevington near Ashford and at Ebbsfleet were well underway. She also said the government had provided assurances that the site at Manston would be available for six months and that the statutory instruments enabling fines to be imposed on lorry drivers who deviated from approved routes to the port or engaged in anti-social parking would go through Parliament shortly.

- (3) Mr Hill commented on the challenges facing the Trading Standards team and said that import referrals had already increased fivefold. He also said that an additional six staff had been recruited and he was reasonably confident that plans were sufficiently robust to meet the challenges. He paid tribute to the community wardens who had made an invaluable contribution to the safety of local communities as they were well trained and well placed to respond in an emergency.
- (4) Mrs Chandler referred to the particular concerns of Dover's residents, who felt they were even further along the front line than the rest of Kent and said the re-assurances given over the weekend had generated some confidence. She also referred to the demands on Integrated Children's Services and said that planning within the directorate had taken account of the impact of Covid-19, the ending of transition arrangements and winter pressures, to ensure that services could continue especially in relation to vulnerable children.
- (5) Mr Gough reminded members of the briefing scheduled for tomorrow and thanked Mrs Cooper and her team for preparing the report.
- (6) Resolved that the KCC and local preparations for the end of the EU Transition phase be noted.

188. Covid -19 Update -presentation

(Item 6)

(Jo Allen, Communications Partner was in attendance for this item)

- (1) Andrew Scott-Clark (Director of Public Health) gave a presentation updating members on the position relating to the Covid-19 pandemic in Kent. A copy of the presentation is at an appendix to these minutes. Following the presentation, Mr Gough said he had written to Mr Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care arguing that, while high infection rates were a major cause of concern across large parts of the county, some areas with very low rates lent themselves to a more granular, locally-targeted approach. The letter also requested aid from the military with the logistics of rolling out a mass testing programme.
- (2) In response to a question about why Kent had been placed in Tier 3 especially as some areas within Kent had very low or no infections of

Covid-19 and the evidence used by Government to inform its decision, Mr Gough said that the Government had taken upper tier authorities as the most appropriate unit to be dealing with. Mr Scott-Clark confirmed that infections were reported based on where an individual lived and not on the hospital in which they were being treated. He said the NHS locally were under pressure as a result of both rising infection rates in the population and on the numbers of staff testing positive for Covid-19. He said the number of infections in the community had increased, the number of people requiring hospital treatment had also increased and it was expected that death rates would also increase.

- (3) Mr Whiting referred to the impact of the pandemic on the local economy and in particular on the hospitality sector as well as the measures introduced to help business and the fact that he wrote weekly to the Government setting out the concerns of business leaders.
- (4) Mr Hill reported on a day of action during which Kent Trading Standards had investigated 242 referrals from Kent Police and 62 from Kent Environmental Health Officers which resulted in visits to 48 businesses and the issuing of 13 prohibition notices. He also said he would send a note to members about the libraries and other services in his portfolio, however, 28 libraries would remain open, deaths could be registered over the phone, and citizenship and wedding ceremonies could re-start.
- (5) Mrs Chandler said that lockdown and being placed in Tier 3 had created problems for the delivery of statutory services as had the rising infection rates. The managers of the Children and Young Peoples directorate had sought to maintain a balance between protecting the health of front line staff such as social workers and continuing to provide services to vulnerable children. She said that with the appropriate risk assessments and protective equipment face to face visits would continue.
- (6) Mr Oakford said he had been contacted by businesses, particularly hospitality businesses, in Tunbridge Wells where Covid-19 infection rates were among the lowest in the country and wanted to understand the reasons why the hospitality sector could not open but shops and gyms could. Mr Scott-Clark and Mr Gough said the decision was taken nationally and Mr Scott-Clark undertook to provide evidence produced by SAGE which the Government had used to inform its decision. He also said there was evidence that suggested that Tier 3 restrictions in other parts of the country had driven infection rates down, Tier 2 restrictions had not contributed to the reduction in rates and had maintained rates of infection while Tier 1 restrictions had not worked.
- (7) Mr Oakford outlined the additional funding being provided to local authorities in Tier 3 and to the support being provided to business including the business rates holiday, the extension of the furlough schemes to the end of March and the support to the self-employed. He said these schemes were worth billions, but it was important to understand the challenges being faced by business.

(8) Mr Gough said the authority had responded to the announcement that Kent and Medway were to be in Tier 3 and that it was important to continue to support business, roll out local testing and tracing, support the Trading Standards team with enforcement and to work with district councils and partners to join up responses to challenges associated with the pandemic and ensure consistent messaging with a view to reducing infection rates.

(9) Resolved that the update be noted.

189. Budget Consultation 2021-22

(Item 7)

Simon Pleace (Revenue and Tax Strategy Manager) was in attendance for this item

(1) Mr Oakford introduced the report which set out the approach taken for the Budget Consultation. He said the consultation had asked residents to consider where savings could be made. He said the response was excellent and he thanked those who had participated as well as the officer who had collated the data especially as the consultation period had only ended on 24 November. Simon Pleace gave a presentation summarising the responses received to each question in the consultation. A copy of the presentation is at an appendix to these minutes.

(2) Mr Gough said it was heartening to see the scale of response to the consultation and that it was important to take the messages from it. He also thanked Mr Pleace for his presentation.

(3) Resolved that the report and the presentation be noted