



AGENDA

CABINET

Thursday, 28th October, 2021, at 10.00 am Ask for: **Emily Kennedy**
Council Chamber, Sessions House, Telephone: **Tel: 03000 419625**
County Hall, Maidstone **emily.kennedy@kent.gov.uk**

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

1. Apologies and Substitutes
2. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this meeting
3. Cabinet Member Updates
4. Spending Review - Verbal Update
5. Supporting Kent Residents Through the Covid-19 Pandemic (Pages 1 - 10)
6. Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) - Support for Residents and Businesses (Pages 11 - 16)
7. Kent County Council COP26 Environment Paper (Pages 17 - 28)

EXEMPT ITEMS

(At the time of preparing the agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public)

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel
03000 416814

Wednesday, 20 October 2021

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From: Roger Gough, Leader
Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance

To: Cabinet

Date: 28 October 2021

Decision No: n/a

Subject: Supporting Kent Residents Through the Covid-19 Pandemic

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an overall briefing on Kent County Council's work to support Kent residents through the Covid-19 Pandemic so far. This includes setting out the key Covid-19 grants and funds received from Government and how they have been utilised. A report setting out the support provided through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund is elsewhere on this agenda. The briefing will then outline ongoing and future programmes of work to continue supporting Kent's most vulnerable populations over the next 12 to 18 months.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to note and comment on the report and activity to date and endorse the current and future programme of work.

1. Introduction

1.1 Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Kent County Council has worked hard to support Kent residents, particularly those most vulnerable in society. Through a multitude of interventions and working closely with key strategic and local partners such as district and borough councils, the voluntary and community sector and Parish and Town Councils, Kent County Council has utilised new and existing mechanisms to provide support to those most in need, to safeguard them and where possible mitigate risk of hardship. This effort has been genuinely cross-organisational, encompassing every Directorate and almost every division and team, resulting in rapid reprioritisation and redeployment of resource, and supported by a number of Government funds and grants.

1.2 In responding to the challenges brought about by the pandemic, partners in Kent have worked even more closely together, with relationships strengthened further by the intense collaboration required, be that between County and District Councils, Police, Fire, Health, Parish Councils, Job Centre Plus, Utilities, Transport Providers, the Voluntary and Community Sector, Private Sector and more. The challenge as we look towards recovery is to maintain these relationships and new ways of working which will be imperative to achieving the shared outcomes prioritised by organisations across Kent.

1.3 This report endeavours to briefly summarise activity to date and the impact of that activity, before looking ahead to key programmes of work over the next 12-18 months.

1.4 Cabinet is asked to note and comment on the report and activity to date and endorse the future programme of work.

2. Winter Grant Fund – Covid Local Support Grant - Household Support Grant

2.1 In November 2020, the Government announced the Winter Grant Fund, a £170m package of support to County and Unitary Authorities to administer direct assistance to vulnerable households and individuals across England. Specifically, this was targeted at those most in need of help accessing and affording food and emergency supplies, energy and water bills and other vital costs, at a time when many people had either lost jobs or were furloughed, those shielding had to remain at home, and household bills were increasing.

2.2 This equated to an initial £4.5m in Kent, which was subsequently topped up by a further £1.5m, making £6m in total. The funding was predominantly split between continuing Free School Meals in the school holidays and providing additional capacity and resource for Kent Support & Assistance Service (KSAS).

2.3 From the start of the pandemic a different approach was taken to the majority of County Councils across the country, with Kent County Council devolving almost £1m to District Councils to support the establishment and operation of a range of crucial community-based initiatives including the Community Hubs, recognising the unique and crucial role District Councils play in their community, their knowledge of key local ground-level organisations and groups, and access to local facilities and staff which could be redeployed at short notice. The Community Hubs supported local people with food, emergency supplies and help whilst isolating (particularly Kent's Clinically Extremely Vulnerable community), help at community centres and youth hubs, ground-level VCS organisations delivering direct to vulnerable people including befriending services, debt advice and support for victims of domestic abuse.

2.4 The support provided by Community Hubs and others was underpinned by Kent County Council establishing the Kent Together helpline and website, utilising Kent County Council's contact centre and website resources and ability to add specialist capacity at short notice. Kent Together provided a central mechanism for receiving requests for assistance, triaging those requests and making referrals to the Community Hubs and other key services. Kent Together remains live, and since April 2020 has triaged over 8,600 requests for support resulting in 6,300 referrals to partner organisations and the Community Hubs.

2.5 On 14 April 2021, the Department for Work & Pensions wrote to say it was renaming the grant to the Covid Local Support grant and extending the period in which the Grant should be spent from 16th April to 20 June 2021 and awarding Kent County Council a further £1.06m.

2.6 The Department for Work & Pensions issued a draft letter to Local Authorities on 21 June 2021 informing them that the Covid Local Support grant will be extended for a final time over the summer break, with funding to be spent by 30 September 2021. The Leader took an urgent decision, 21/00062, accepting the additional grant, confirming spend in accordance with key decision 21/00038, authorising the provision of free school meals support through the summer holidays, and delegating authority to the Corporate Director Finance to take the necessary actions to spend the grant money and implement the decision, together with authority to accept any future grant provided for similar purposes and to spend this in accordance with the governance framework put in place by the decision.

2.7 On 7 October 2021 Department for Work & Pensions issued draft grant determination letters and guidance relating to the new Household Support Grant. Kent County Council's allocated sum is £11.065m. The purpose of this grant is almost identical to those of the previous Winter and Covid Local Support Grants. Accordingly, under existing delegation, the Corporate Director for Finance approved accepting the grant and allocated £750k to the provision of support for benefits related free school meals families during the October half term (21/0090).

2.8 The Corporate Director Finance after consultation with the Leader, made the decision to allocate £750k towards providing free school meals support during October half-term. This would have been the first school holiday for one year which did not have this financial support had this action not been taken. It coincided with the end of furlough, the removal of the additional £20 per week universal credit payment, energy price rises, fuel shortages and general cost of living pressures.

3. Covid-19 Emergency Grant

3.1 Throughout 2020 and into 2021, the Government provided a number of tranches of one off Covid-19 Emergency Grant Funding to Local Authorities across England. This was in recognition of the critical role Local Authorities were playing in responding to the pandemic and protecting the most vulnerable in the community, and the extra cost pressures and loss of income councils were facing.

3.2 Kent County Council received 4 tranches of funding totalling £94.9m. District Councils and Kent Fire & Rescue Service received their own allocations directly from Government. This funding allowed Kent County Council to continue to provide critical front-line services including in social care and public health, absorbing some of the additional cost pressures brought about as a result of responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. Helping Hands Scheme

4.1 In February 2021, Kent County Council announced a local discretionary scheme designed to offer support directly to those Kent residents and businesses most impacted by the pandemic. The Helping Hands scheme would set aside £10m of the emergency Covid-19 monies to underpin a raft of projects and workstreams that would not only offer support now, but aim to provide a sustainable legacy and increase community resilience for the future.

4.2 Building on the support provided to date, the main aims of the Helping Hands fund are as follows:

- To ensure those who most need help receive it, with a focus on equality of access, and consistency of approach to assessing eligibility across the county;
- To provide guidance and advice that supports those seeking help to improve their situation and avoid future dependency;
- To use this opportunity to improve the system for addressing financial hardship across the county, and preparing for what lies ahead
- To support local businesses and the self-employed that have been significantly impacted by the pandemic.
- To ensure that the funding is used for time limited activity with a clear exit strategy in recognition that it is one-off funding

4.3 The four categories of spend and the proposed allocations are as follows:

- a) £4m to support low income households and households in financial distress, including through council services such as the Kent Support and Assistance Service, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, such as Kent Community Foundation and utility companies such as South East Water.
- b) £3m to provide a range of support for businesses and the self-employed not in receipt of government funding, including through council services, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, and business support organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce.
- c) £2.5m to tackle digital poverty, working with schools and colleges, district and borough councils and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- d) £500k to match-fund crowdfunded community projects and initiatives that support local communities in responding to and recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

Residential

4.4 £4m was allocated to support low income households and those in financial distress. This includes providing support to families and individuals in food and fuel poverty and with other essentials through the Council's Kent Support and Assistance Service, district and borough councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, such as Kent Community Foundation and utility companies such as South East Water. The funding is and will also be used to provide financial advice and support to address debt and financial hardship and capability issues. Funding will also continue to be made available to voluntary and community sector organisations to support them to be more sustainable. Part of the funding will be allocated to enhance existing services, including mental health, suicide prevention, domestic abuse drug and alcohol misuse services and support for both young and old experiencing social isolation, all of which have seen significant increases in need due to the impact of the pandemic.

4.5 A number of projects have been developed to support residents in Financial Hardship which are outlined below:

- Fuel Poverty – the fuel poverty project is looking to support residents across the county with crisis support payments, funding for item support (warm blankets, temporary heaters), debt advice and training for front line professionals to recognise fuel poverty.
- Water Poverty – the water poverty project is looking to support residents in fuel poverty through using water providers across the county to target support to residents most in need.
- Debt Advice – the debt advice work is intending to provide financial advice and support to people in hardship and provide a financial plan to support them and improve their financial resilience.
- Underwritten Loans Scheme – the underwritten loans scheme is a partnership project with Citizen's Advice Bureau and Kent Savers. The project will provide no interest loans to residents in high interest debt. Applicants would need to undertake financial resilience training to improve their financial resilience.
- Support for those who are new to financial hardship – one of the areas of focus for the residential workstream is to support people who are new to financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. The work in this area is currently being developed to

support these people with accessing services where they may be unclear about what support is available.

Business

4.6 Evidence from the Business Help-Line that has been providing advice and guidance to businesses since the start of the pandemic highlights the significant impact on businesses and personal liquidity.

4.7 It was proposed to use part of the allocation to support micro businesses (i.e. with nine or fewer employees) and the self-employed to establish a small capital grants scheme. This will include contributing to the costs of making business premises 'Covid secure', purchasing hardware and software to enable online trading, and funding capital improvements that will enable businesses to respond to changing demand.

4.8 Businesses accessing the small capital grants scheme will be offered business advice alongside their grant support. This will be procured from a third party provider by the Council. It will enable businesses to access up to 6 hours' business advice (depending on need) in business planning, development, diversification, digital adoption, and so on, and signposting to other services as appropriate. This responds to evidence that business advice increases firm resilience and can enable businesses to access further specialist support in the future.

4.9 To deliver the small capital grants scheme, the Council is working closely with district and borough councils and the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, building on the excellent joint working that has taken place throughout the pandemic.

4.10 Evidence from a major study by NESTA and SAGE in 2018, highlighted that business productivity depended on access to digital infrastructure but more importantly on digital skills. 38% of small businesses still lack digital skills, so part of the funding aims to address these issues as part of the broader digital inclusion and capability agenda.

Digital

4.11 £2.5m was allocated to tackle digital poverty out of the £10m from the COVID-19 Emergency Grant Funding. In addition, in June 2021, an additional £2.5m was allocated from Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF). In total £5m has been allocated to support digital inclusion and capability projects and schemes.

4.12 The digital inclusion and capability workstream is working with partners and stakeholders, such as voluntary and community sector organisations and borough and district councils to ensure that existing successful projects and schemes are scaled-up or enhanced for the benefit of residents, particularly those in financial hardship or at-risk of financial hardship, as well as those, disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

4.13 All projects and schemes supported by the digital inclusion and capability workstream are meeting these key principles:

- Tailored – interventions, projects and schemes are tailored to the beneficiaries to maximise outcomes.
- Holistic – interventions, projects and schemes are providing a holistic solution to beneficiaries to ensure that residents and businesses can continue to be digitally included in a sustainable way.
- Sustainable – interventions, projects and schemes that aim to provide sustainability into the medium and long term for both the beneficiaries and the local authorities.

- Cohesive – interventions, projects and schemes are being developed cohesively with partners and stakeholders, to ensure that the outcomes and successes are jointly shared.

4.14 The workstream has made strong links with borough and district councils and will continue to do so, but has also made positive working relationships with the NHS CCG, other local authorities outside Kent and national organisations both public and private, such as Citizens Online, Good Things Foundation and Dixons Carphone.

4.15 Internally the workstream continues to engage and work collaboratively with Growth & Communities, particularly with the Broadband team, as well as the Strategic Reset Programme, Digital Accessibility Group, Digital Transformation Group and divisional teams such as the innovation units within Adult Social Care & Health and Children, Young People & Education.

4.16 The workstream is developing several projects and schemes, which aim to support the key elements of digital inclusion and capability (equipment/connectivity, skills, accessibility, motivation/awareness), as well as support the levelling-up agenda for residents and businesses. The projects/schemes being developed are outlined briefly below:

- **Engagement, Skills and Training Project:** A new team is being recruited to deliver over 200 engagement and skills sessions on digital inclusion and capability, as well as, recruit, onboard and retain over 350 volunteer digital champions.
- **Device Recycling Scheme:** We are currently developing a recycling scheme to enable us to provide hardware to residents that are in financial hardship or at-risk of financial hardship. This scheme will also enable our local authority partners to donate their retired equipment for the benefit of the community and we have already had several organisations interested in donating their devices to this scheme.
- **Community Wi-Fi Scheme:** There are a few strands to this scheme as outlined below:
 - **Rural Community/Village Facilities:** We are currently in discussion with Rural Kent to investigate how we can improve connectivity in rural locations, particularly those identified by the digital exclusion report, with Kent Public Services Network (KPSN).
 - **Residential/Community Wi-Fi:** We are currently at the feasibility stage with three district areas (Folkestone & Hythe, Swale and Thanet) to extend the current KPSN network into residential or community areas. Longer term maintenance of the infrastructure is being brokered with other organisations for sustainability.
 - **Care Home Wi-Fi:** Adult Social Care & Health are leading on this COMF funded project to improve Wi-Fi in care homes. The workstream is supporting this project, to ensure that we cohesively tackle this issue, alongside the other projects listed above.
- **Digital Enhancement Fund (Kent Community Foundation):** The workstream is working with the Kent Community Foundation to establish a one-off match funding to support the voluntary and community sector to improve digital inclusion for the sector's beneficiaries from device loaning schemes to intensive skills training (including English as a second language).
- **Digital Inclusion Platform:** The workstream is attempting to use best practice to aggregate all digital inclusion and capability schemes to help professionals both internally and for our partners and stakeholders to share the schemes and projects available, including those delivered by the private/corporate sector. This platform will

also enable residents and business (particularly SMEs) to upskill having access to bitesize courses and skills training to improve their digital skills and capabilities.

- **Broadband Connectivity (Social Housing and MDUs):** The workstream is working closely with the Growth & Communities Broadband team to improve market-led investment in connections to social housing and multiple dwelling units/housing of multiple occupancy.

4.17 In addition to these projects, we are also supporting various district-led projects, such as the Pyramid Project's Isle of Sheppey digital inclusion project, Citizen's Advice North West Kent project and Dover's Community Engagement team's outreach project and we are continuing to do this. We have also supported Swale Borough Council in spending their COMF allocation.

4.18 For reference, we have identified or allocated the following from the various funds with the majority of the remaining funds likely to be fully spent over the next 12 months:

Fund	Allocated	Notes
Helping Hands Digital (£2.5m)	£467,904	
COMF Digital (£2.5m)	£1,768,500	
Additional Funding	£285,000	Funding from district allocated COMF funding, as well as, potentially funding secured from partners/stakeholders.

4.19 Due to the limitations and requirements around the different funding, our strategy is to utilise the COMF funding allocated (where it meets the funding criteria) as a priority.

Crowdfunding

4.20 The council's draft Civil Society strategy committed £100k to developing crowdfunding as one of a range of ways to support local grass roots voluntary and community sector organisations. As part of the response to the impact of Covid £500k was allocated to enable local groups to come forward with crowdfunding projects and initiatives that will support local communities impacted by Covid-19 and build towards the recovery from the pandemic.

Data Sharing

4.21 Across local authorities, at both County and District level, we cannot effectively identify individuals at risk of crisis. As such there is a strategic need to develop a solution which allows frontline teams greater visibility of individual vulnerability, both financially and socially to enable a proactive response in providing support.

4.22 The Data Sharing Workstream within the Financial Hardship Programme aims to test two systems which specialise in extracting, combining, and representing data in a more useful way – *Policy in Practice* and *Xantura*. These systems are being implemented across Kent, in partnership with District level authorities.

Policy in Practice (PIP)

4.23 PIP's 'Low-Income Family Tracker' dashboards combine existing financial data held by a District Local Authority. This data is then re-presented to support targeted campaigns in

local areas. Campaigns may be focussed on areas such as improving pension credit uptake, discretionary housing payments, tv licences and free school meals etc.

4.24 All 12 districts have committed to the pilot of the LIFT software and the campaigns that will be focussed on identifying and supporting low income households and those experiencing financial hardship.

Xantura

4.25 Xantura's 'One View' system takes the data sharing process a step further, with the capacity to incorporate health and social care data as well as produce automated risk alerts for someone entering into crisis.

4.26 A number of councils across the country are using the One View system and have used it as part of the support offered in response to Covid-19. Locally, Maidstone Borough Council has been using Xantura's system since 2019 and have achieved significant social and financial benefits, targeting the system towards homelessness prevention.

4.27 All Kent District and Borough Councils have committed to working together to implement the pilot of the One View system across the county.

Outcomes

4.28 Through trialling these data sharing systems, we expect to be able to prevent vulnerable people from entering into crisis, whether that be through preventing homelessness, consolidating debts, or supporting people to access benefits. Once the systems are in place there is the potential to tackle broader social issues such as domestic violence and avoidable hospital admissions. In order to evidence the outcomes and impacts for both residents and the local authorities, there will be an independent evaluation of both systems.

Referrals

4.29 When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many individuals were furloughed, lost their job or had to stay at home. This resulted in an increase of pressure on personal finances. While the government set up support for individuals, who needed support for a range of issues during the pandemic, it was recognised that most people calling for help were being signposted.

4.30 Signposting is not an ideal process for people who need help, as it is entirely reliant on the individual making onward contact with the organisation or service they have been signposted to, and they may feel demotivated or that 'it is a waste of time' trying to access support when they feel their first attempts were unsuccessful.

4.31 In contrast to signposting, referring an individual to a support service places the ownership of contact on the referring agency, and ensures the individual is not left to initiate contact at a time of crisis or hardship.

4.32 To resolve the limitations of signposting, it was agreed with stakeholders that we should look to implement a secure referral system across the county for organisations to refer individuals through to provide financial advice (and wider holistic support) and that there is a county-wide website or database providing a repository of financial advice and wider support in each area.

4.33 Refernet is an online platform that will support building a referral network across Kent. Refernet is an existing and low-cost network system currently being used in North West Kent by the voluntary sector and run by Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). The Refernet system is to be scaled up across Kent for all organisations to use who make or receive referrals. The Refernet system will also provide the ability to track referrals and generate reports on aggregated data relating to the referrals made - meaning more targeted services can be developed.

Money Advice Service

4.34 The Money Advice Network Service is a free, existing service that taps into resource across the country to give financial advice. The system is provided by the Government and allows reporting to enable the success of the system to be measured. The Money Advice service will link in with Refernet to offer financial support to financial advisors nationwide at no cost.

Online county wide repository of information

4.35 We are linking in with the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) in their work to create a county-wide repository of information and promote the website. The STP is currently putting together a county-wide repository of support information and so Kent County Council could benefit from this work and avoid duplication.

4.36 The intended outcomes of the referrals workstream, is to provide professionals who are supporting those at risk of or experiencing financial hardship access to a robust referral system. By providing the robust referral system, we aim to support those who are already in or at risk of financial hardship to overcome their personal challenges to achieve economic well-being.

5. Next Steps

5.1 As both nationally and locally the transition continues from response to recovery, uncertainties remain about the ongoing impression the pandemic and the subsequent impact it has had on the economy, residents' way of life, how communities interact as well as how any future health implications may affect our most vulnerable communities.

5.2 Over the last 18 months, the cohorts of people within the community most impacted by the pandemic, and the types of support most needed as a result, have evolved considerably and are anticipated to continue to do so. The future work programme therefore requires Kent County Council to maintain a degree of flexibility in how it manages and utilises resources such as the Household Support Fund and the Helping Hands scheme, to ensure the response effort is as efficient and as effective as possible to meet the rapidly changing needs and demands.

5.3 There is a commitment within Kent County Council and partners to achieve as much of a sustainable legacy as is possible with the one-off time-limited funding from Government, increasing community resilience whilst ensuring a clear exit strategy is in place.

6. Recommendation(s)

6.1 Cabinet is asked to note and comment on the report and activity to date and endorse the current and future programme of work.

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From: Roger Gough, Leader
Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance

To: Cabinet

Date: 28 October 2021

Subject: Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) support to residents and businesses

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: N/A

Future Pathway: N/A

Summary

This report provides an overview of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) which is emergency funding provided to KCC to fund activities that contribute towards the prevention or containment of COVID-19 outbreaks. Some of the funding has been used to support residents and businesses that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The report details how a proportion of the COMF has been utilised to provide support to residents and businesses in Kent. This has been achieved through digital support to help individuals remain connected, additional support for carers, additional support for private rented tenants at risk of eviction, additional community wardens, free COVID-19 safe training and funding schemes focused on catch up initiatives that will impact individuals and families. Funding has also been allocated to districts where districts have utilised the grant to support, amongst other things, foodbanks, homeless individuals and families.

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report and to **ENDORSE** the proposed future use of the remaining grant.

1. Context & Overview

- 1.1. In November 2020 Kent County Council (KCC) took the decision to agree to accept the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant provided by government as part of a national funding package aimed at preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19 as well as to support vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- 1.2. Funding levels were assigned to the tiering system in place at the time, in which local authorities would receive a payment of up to £1 to £8 per head of the population, dependent on the Local COVID-19 Alert Level in place. In line

with the national lock down announced on 31st October 2020, KCC were allocated funding of £12,652,440, equalling the maximum allowance (i.e. £8 per head).

- 1.3. Further monthly payments of £6,326,222 were received each month up until March 2021 together with a single payment of £8,350,186 for the 2021/22 year to continue efforts to prevent outbreaks and help those affected by COVID-19. This took the total funding received under COMF to £48,114,998.
- 1.4. As part of the key decision to accept the COMF grant, KCC established a robust funding framework, a director level group (named the COVID-19 Finance Monitoring Group (CFMG)) to oversee and approve the allocations, and allocated staff from Public Health Commissioning and Finance to administer, monitor and report on the fund (COMF Team).
- 1.5. The COMF team has received 667 requests for funding from KCC directorates, Kent districts and external organisations for initiatives that will help to prevent or contain outbreaks of COVID-19 and/or help those that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.
- 1.6. £40m of funding from COMF has been approved covering 306 separate funding requests. Of this total, approximately £28.3m is providing support to vulnerable groups and targeted community interventions as well as support to those self-isolating. The balance of the funding is supporting prevention and management activity (£4.3m), compliance and enforcement (£3m) as well as other areas such as support to Parish and Town councils (£0.8m). Requests for funding are still being received, assessed and reviewed by the COMF team to ensure there is continued support and that funding reacts to where the need is greatest.
- 1.7. This paper outlines the activity supported to date under the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to provide additional support to the residents and businesses of Kent that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

2. Providing Support to Households

- 2.1. At the onset of the pandemic, a primary focus of utilising the COMF money was to help support individuals to isolate safely, and to feel supported to do so. As it quickly became evident the pandemic would last many months, COMF money was also utilised to help vulnerable individuals disproportionately affected by the pandemic to adapt, adjust, and recover.
- 2.2. Funding to support individuals to isolate has been wide ranging. £2.5m has been allocated to the Helping Hands project to help support individuals to become web-enabled to ensure they remain connected at times when they may have needed to isolate. Further funding was provided to deliver assistive technology to vulnerable individuals living in their own homes. The assistive technology helped them to continue to connect with the world enabling them to interact with medical services and friends and family, therefore enabling them to feel connected while self-isolating.

- 2.3. Additional digital bundles were also provided to remote learners to help minimise the impact missing school had on their education. Additional direct payment funding was also provided to eligible Kent families to address the support that would have usually been provided by schools and day centres but could not be due to their closures.
- 2.4. Carers that were isolated at home with the person they care for will have found the absence of their usual support networks difficult. Additional funding has been awarded to organisations, such as those that provide care and support for those living with dementia, to rebuild those support networks and ensure carers are given, and feel safe to take, a break from caring. Furthermore, additional funding was provided to foster carers during the February half term to support the purchase of additional activities for the children they care for.
- 2.5. Many individuals have found themselves under increasing financial pressure as a result of the pandemic and may even be at risk of eviction due to rent arrears. KCC is working with the Kent Housing Group to distribute £2.5m of funding across all 12 districts to support private rented tenants that are at risk of becoming homeless. In addition to directly supporting the tenants, the funding will also cover an educational package for private landlords to educate them on the range of options available to support tenants that may have fallen into rent arrears.
- 2.6. The pandemic has left a considerable legacy where additional catch-up support will be required. COMF money is being utilised to provide support to households to address this. £2.5m has been allocated to KCC's Reconnect Programme, helping to provide additional opportunities for children and young adults and their families. One example of activity delivered under Reconnect delivered over 82,000 online learning opportunities. Furthermore, £2.65m has been awarded to over 900 early years settings in Kent to fund additional catch-up support for children and additional opportunities for families to come together. Additionally, the COMF team established a COVID-19 grant scheme which provided funding to voluntary and community sector organisations. The grants were awarded through a number of rounds with values ranging between £5k-£10k and to date over 100 grants have been awarded. Two grant rounds that will benefit households in Kent are 'Reintegration activities for families with young children and expectant parents' and 'Supporting individuals and communities to self-isolate'

3. Providing Support to Businesses

- 3.1. In addition to providing support to residents, the COMF has been utilised to provide additional support to Kent businesses outside of the support packages provided by central government. In addition to direct support, the COMF has been utilised by KCC Communications to promote awareness of central government support packages for businesses to increase uptake.
- 3.2. To help support businesses to protect their organisation, staff and customers, KCC launched a COVID-19 safe training scheme which was free to access

for small and micro businesses in Kent. The training provided an overview of good infection control and updates on the latest government guidance. The training will build the skills of businesses in being able to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and any future pandemics.

3.3. KCC Arts and Culture have also launched a grant scheme, providing funding of up to £5k to support the cultural, creative and voluntary sector to adapt their delivery models in a way that promotes the safe engagement of communities while reducing the barriers to the organisation to invest in these changes.

3.4. VisitEngland created the 'We're Good to Go' COVID-19 industry standard and consumer mark as a way for businesses to reassure customers that the business adheres to Government and Public Health guidance. Funding was provided from the COMF to VisitKent to promote uptake of this mark to encourage customers back into businesses in Kent.

4. Working in Partnership with Districts

4.1. KCC has worked in partnership with all twelve districts throughout the pandemic and these partnership arrangements have been really valuable and effective. To date, £6m has been distributed across districts from the COMF grant. Allocations to districts were calculated based on population data, levels of deprivation and the COVID-19 rates at the time of allocation.

4.2. Funding to the districts has enabled each district to respond to local needs and provide support to their households in need. The district allocations enabled funding to be directed to local foodbanks to ensure they had the supplies to support their local communities. The district COMF allocations were also utilised by districts to house their homeless communities to not only ensure they were safe, warm and dry, but also had access to up-to-date COVID-19 information and guidance and Personal Protective Equipment.

5. Future Support

5.1. The initiatives directly supported by KCC and through the districts will fund activity until the 31st March 2022 which is in line with the COMF grant criteria. KCC will continue to monitor and respond to the changing needs over winter, implementing additional interventions and packages of funding where necessary. This will ensure there is continued funding over the winter period to support individuals most impacted by the pandemic.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations

The Cabinet is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report and to **ENDORSE** the proposed future use of the remaining grant.

7. Background Documents

None

8. Contact details

Report Authors

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From: Susan Carey, Cabinet Member for Environment

To: Cabinet Meeting – 28 October 2021

Decision No: N/A

Subject: Kent County Council COP26 Environment Paper

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: n/a

Future Pathway of Paper: n/a

Electoral Division: County-wide

Summary: In support of the UK's COP26 Presidency [United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties 26], Kent County Council is working across sectors and joining forces with local authorities, businesses and residents across Kent and Medway, to inspire action ahead of, during and beyond COP26. This includes projects and events to improve adaptation, countryside access, green infrastructure, EV charge points and the low carbon economy. This paper details the activity across Kent linking to COP26 goals.

Recommendation(s):

1. Cabinet to note KCC's work date and future plans on the Environment.
2. Cabinet to consider in the light of COP26 what more might be done across KCC and with partners to help us achieve the COP26 targets.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 21st UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP21) brought together heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change. During this conference in Paris, in 2015, countries agreed¹ to work together to limit global warming to below 2 degrees compared to pre-industrial levels by the end of this century, and to aim for 1.5 degrees. Beyond 2 degrees Celsius, studies suggest that we are likely to "lock the climate" into a state of continuing loss of arctic sea ice, sea level rise, increased wildfire activity, shifts in agricultural yields, and greater stress on water supplies globally.
- 1.2 In November 2021, the UK will host the 26th COP in Glasgow. This is widely viewed as a pivotal moment for countries to work together to secure global

¹ Via the Paris Agreement – a legally binding international treaty on climate change

Net Zero² by 2050; adapt to protect communities and natural habitats affected by climate change; mobilise finance to support action; and finalise how partners across the globe will deliver the Paris Agreement.

- 1.3 Through COP26, the UK government must demonstrate ambition and leadership to inspire and influence countries across the globe to continue to make the commitments needed to tackle the considerable challenges ahead. During COP26, countries will be required to show how they will achieve four objectives:
- Secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees as the target maximum global temperature rise by the end of this century compared to pre-industrial levels.
 - Achieve and implement climate change adaptation to protect communities and natural habitats
 - Mobilise finance to achieve the above
 - Work together to deliver the above
- 1.4 At Kent County Council, we acknowledge that we have a crucial role to play in carbon emission reductions and adaptation to climate change, through our strategic and statutory roles and through our services. COP26 presents a timely opportunity to highlight how we are working with local authorities and partners across Kent and Medway to support a green recovery from coronavirus, achieve Net Zero and support a resilient and healthy local economy, natural environment, and resilient community. This report details the ongoing, collaborative efforts we are leading across Kent to inspire action and contribute towards each of these globally significant goals.

2. COP26 Goal #1: Secure global Net Zero by 2050

- 2.1 Countries are being asked to come forward with ambitious 2030 emissions reductions targets that align with reaching Net Zero (carbon emissions) by 2050. To deliver on these stretching targets, countries will need to:
- accelerate the phase-out of coal
 - curtail deforestation
 - speed up the switch to electric vehicles
 - encourage investment in renewables³.
- 2.2 In Kent and Medway, our Emissions Analysis and Pathways to Net Zero 2050 report (December 2020) was commissioned to understand the optimum pathway for achieving in Kent and Medway the target of Net Zero by 2050. This report is helping local authorities set area and organisational five-year

² 'net zero' means that carbon emissions are minimised, and any remaining emissions are balanced by absorbing an equivalent amount from the atmosphere, via a process known as carbon offsetting. Carbon offsetting is an action or activity (such as the planting of trees, hedgerows or other biological, chemical, or physical processes) that achieves that absorption.

³ COP26 Goals are those stated on the [COP26 website](#)

carbon budgets⁴ and emission reduction pathways to 2050. It also helps identify which sectors are the largest emitters and what key action is needed to be able to reach Net Zero. This [Pathways report](#). This Pathways report was considered by the County Council's Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee 29th June 2021.

- 2.3 KCC has committed to a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 for its own estate and services. KCC continues to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as planned and is ahead of the previous 5-year reduction target set in 2016. The £40m project to switch 120,000 streetlights to LED (Light Emitting Diodes) was one of the key projects in reducing carbon emissions (and saving energy costs) and in the last 10 years KCC has reduced its carbon emissions by 73%. Now a new way of measuring carbon emissions is being introduced to capture more data and bring us in line with how the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) measures emissions. This was detailed in the paper presented to Cabinet 30th September 2021.
- 2.4 KCC has secured grant funding of £20.6m from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme that is expected to deliver a further reduction of 40% in KCC's carbon emissions by March 2022. The programme includes the construction and purchase of solar parks, installing solar on KCC buildings, replacing oil and gas boilers with heat pumps and other energy efficiency measures. LED upgrades have been completed for four of KCC's buildings with an estimated annual saving of 13 tonnes of CO₂. Before the upgrade, these four buildings produced 19 tonnes of CO₂ per annum, and after LED installations, this has reduced to 6 tonnes. We are working to deliver a large LED installation at Ashford Highways Depot; again, before the upgrade, this building was emitting 27.6 tonnes of CO₂ per year, and after the installation, this has reduced to 12.8 tonnes, saving us 14.8 tonnes per year. We are continuing to deliver the Air Source Heat Pump at Ashford Highways Depot and the Ground Source Heat Pump at the Swattenden Centre. The Swattenden Centre is a particularly exciting project as it will completely convert the site from its oil-fired heating system to low carbon heating, saving around 45 tonnes CO₂ every year, a 66% reduction in emissions. SAS Energy are currently working on project delivery to install solar on six KCC buildings and the total project is estimated to save 85.7 tonnes of CO₂ every year. We have also appointed Kier to deliver a 3MW solar park at the Kings Hill former rare pig farm site, and they have started the initial non-invasive surveys. We are also negotiating the purchase of a large solar park in Herne Bay.
- 2.5 KCC is facilitating a District and Borough wide EV (electric vehicle) charger network project. This is intended to provide hundreds of Fast (7kwh) and Rapid (75kwh) charging points across Kent and Medway and will operate as a supplier funded model with revenue share back to the local authorities. We

⁴ A carbon budget is a self-set cap on the amount of greenhouse gases emitted in an area over a five-year period.

have recently awarded the tender for the District EV charger network to *Connected Kerb* covering six Kent Districts and Medway.

- 2.6 KCC is also keen to ensure our smaller communities do not miss out, and as such, we are working with interested parish and town councils to install EV fast charging points on appropriate public land they may own. This scheme is revenue sharing and will provide Fast charging from 7-22kwh, similar to speeds you might expect to receive at home, with funding provided by the Government Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV), Kent Lane Rental Fund and the Department for Transport. So far, we have installed 20 charge sockets and have a further 30 in development. Additionally, another 25 Parishes have applied which is likely to lead to a further 50 charge sockets. 14 rapid taxi and private hire vehicle EV chargers have been installed with another 14 to follow by the end of 2022.
- 2.7 KCC has obtained over £380k from the Department for Transport (DfT) Capability Fund for an active travel behaviour change programme. There are 12 workstreams to the programme which include initiatives to make active transport more accessible to primary schools, young people, workplaces, key workers, and businesses. KCC also secured an extension to the funding for the E- Cycle scheme via the DfT Access Fund, which allows £87.5k for the purchase of electric cycles and training. E-cycle training will be extended in three districts, Canterbury, Maidstone, and Dover (delivery in Deal) with the potential for further roll out depending on success.
- 2.8 Solar Together Kent is a collective solar panel buying scheme that helps households get a reduced-price installation of solar panels. It was coordinated by KCC together with Medway Council and nine District/Borough Councils and was run in partnership with iChoosr (the collective buying provider). Installations will continue through Autumn 2021 with a total of 450 installations expected, providing an annual CO₂ reduction of 450 tonnes. We are exploring with the provider how we might improve the scheme for a second phase from Spring 2022.
- 2.9 Low Carbon Across the South and East (LoCASE), led by KCC provides financial assistance and business support to increase demand for clean technology, increase energy efficiency of businesses, and increase growth of the low carbon environmental goods and services sector. The programme was extended to June 2023 with an additional £14m grant from the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Since LoCASE was extended, there have been 1,436 enquiry forms submitted across the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) area. 105 projects have already been approved, totalling £617,806. This is in addition to the initial programme which ran from February 2016 and supported 1,278 small and medium enterprises, through £5m of grant funding, totalling investments of £12.5m. In May 2021, Low Carbon Kent Network won the category Delivering Clean Growth in the national ADEPT⁵ President's Award. In September 2021, Kent

⁵ Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport

was the South East's venue for the COP26 Zero Carbon Tour Battle Bus - again aimed at supporting our small and medium sized enterprises with knowledge, understanding and grants to tackle their own carbon footprints.

- 2.10 Kent REVS Up for Cleaner Air Scheme is a project encouraging businesses to make the switch to electric vehicles to improve air quality and limit the impact of climate change. KCC secured £1.5M of Highways England funding to operate a two-year electric van scheme for businesses. REVS is now underway with 39 of the 48-van fleet now with KCC and over 115 businesses have already trialled an electric vehicle across the county. At the end of the two-year project these vehicles will become part of KCC's own fleet replacing petrol and hybrid vehicles. The project also includes funding for more EV charging points.
- 2.11 Through our positive hosting arrangement for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit we secure additional workstreams that help reduce emissions of greenhouse gasses and sequester carbon, often these projects have 'co-benefits' for nature or landscape enhancements or support the AONB economy. Examples include the Experience sustainable rural tourism project, supporting local businesses to generate new experiential tourism focusing on low carbon activities, a second example is the recently launched Farming in Protected Landscape grant programme which will deliver grant funding expected to amount to nearly £1.5m climate and nature are key targets with a focus on reducing farm and rural business-based greenhouse gas emissions which account for around 10% of the UK's emissions.

3. COP26 Goal #2: Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats

- 3.1 The climate is already changing and it will continue to change even as we reduce emissions, with potentially devastating effects. We need to adapt to these changes. At COP26 countries need to work together to enable and encourage those affected by climate change to:
- protect and restore ecosystems
 - build defences, warning systems and resilient infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods and even lives⁶
- 3.2 KCC commissioned the Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment for Kent and Medway (CCRIA). This Assessment has been developed as a county-level version of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. The study is pioneering as very few local authorities have conducted climate change risk assessments at this scale. The CCRIA highlights the environmental changes Kent could experience over the next 20-80 years, the potential risks, and opportunities these changes pose to Kent's society, economy and environment, and recommendations for adaptation action.

⁶ COP26 Goals are those stated on the [COP26 website](#)

- 3.3 KCC and Cranfield University have developed a rainwater harvesting tool to help farmers and businesses better understand the opportunities for rainwater harvesting and the associated water resources, irrigation management and investment issues. This will help Kent's soft fruit production farms, one of the largest concentrations of fruit farms in the UK. The user-friendly tool with accompanying guide is available for free online. The tool supports farmers in calculating the most effective rainwater harvesting system for their circumstances, considering local climate variability as well as farm information on cropped areas, crop types and storage.
- 3.4 The Interreg funded STAR2Cs (Short Term Adaptation for long term Resilience To Climate Change) project, led by KCC, united eight partners who are working to overcome similar challenges by improving and increasing climate change adaptation. STAR2Cs' primary goal was to overcome the 'implementation gap' currently faced in delivering local action to build adaptation. The project came to an end in August 2021 after over four years of work. KCC held the final conference on 17 June 2021 to share experiences and lessons learned on building local resilience to climate change across the partnership. The project outputs included innovative tools to encourage adaptation, social engagement strategies to increase climate awareness and action, and case studies of the pilot regions.
- 3.5 The Interreg funded Cool Towns project, united a range of partners including KCC who were looking at innovative ways to deliver blue/green infrastructure to manage heat risk. As one of the Kent projects within this programme we delivered a tree planting project in Margate that not only tackles known surface water risks being experienced by a number of identified streets (through an underground water recharge system linked to each tree's plot), but simultaneously provides canopy cover to those same streets, providing shade for vulnerable residents in a known heat stressed part of the town.
- 3.6 KCC's report, Natural Solutions to Climate Change in Kent (June 2021), provides a better understanding of the potential for nature-based solutions in the county. Whilst the Council's estate presents opportunities, wider joined up thinking and partnership working will enable bigger and better gains for the county. Rather than develop a strategy for nature-based solutions, we will look to provide the strategic framework for these in Kent within the legislatively required Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Environment Bill (now expected to get royal assent in October 2021) introduces a requirement for a county-scale Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and the Kent Nature Partnership has established a task and finish group to take forward this work, with KCC and Kent Wildlife Trust jointly leading.
- 3.7 A Kent Tree Establishment Strategy will be examined by the KCC Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee 3rd November 2021. This outlines how KCC will, working in partnership, see the realisation of the ambition for Kent to extend its tree cover by 1.5 million by 2030, establishing one new tree for every resident living in the county. Additionally, Kent will have an average tree canopy cover of 19% by 2050, the target recommended by the Committee on Climate Change. The delivery of these new trees,

alongside the protection and restoration of existing trees, hedgerow, and woodland, will support the recovery of wildlife, provide natural climate solutions, and enrich people's lives. All trees established under our Tree Strategy will follow principles for tree establishment in Kent, building on the philosophy of the "right tree in the right place" and the trees will be established by a combination of new stock and through managed natural regeneration.

3.8 Since stating its ambitions in 2019 for 1.5 million new trees to be established in the county, Kent County Council has delivered the following:

- 48,075 trees planted by the Old Chalk New Downs project, with KCC and Heritage Lottery Funding (2019-21).
- 16,000 trees and hedges planted by the county's Countryside Management Partnerships (2019).
- 13,615 trees planted by the Kent Downs AONB's Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme, with KCC and Heritage Lottery Funding (2020-21).
- Average of 900 street trees planted per annum by Kent Highways (2019-21).
- 1094 trees planted by Kent Highways and Canterbury City Council as part of the Canterbury - The Story of England project (2021-23).
- £275,129 of funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund, delivering 250 standard trees and 41,000 whips in Ashford and Swale in 2021/22.
- £500,000 from the Shared Outcomes Fund, to deliver 3,588 trees and 6,408m² of natural regeneration through the Trees Outside Woodland project (2020-23).
- Appointment of a of a dedicated officer to oversee the delivery of the Kent Tree Establishment Strategy.

3.9 In delivering Kent's Plan Bee (KCC's Pollinator Action Plan), we have established a partnership between Kent Wildlife Trust and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and, for a second year, we have seconded an expert officer from these charities to help us take forward this work. Key areas of work include: reviewing how we manage the land we own, manage or influence so that all opportunities to enhance our estate for the benefits of pollinators are taken; using mapping such as B-Lines, to identify which sites offer the greatest potential and should be prioritised for potential maintenance changes; using the north Kent Fastrack route to promote the Plan Bee action plan; engaging the public in the pollinator agenda, with a focus on the Shril Carder Bee; exploring bee friendly bus shelters with green roofs; and supporting Kent's districts in the development of their own pollinator action plans through the provision of the Kent Plan Bee blueprint.

3.10 Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KCSP) are the Conservation Activities Consultant for Ashford Borough Council's £3 million National Lottery Heritage Project in Victoria Park, tasked with bringing nature to life for people working, visiting, and engaging with the park. North West Kent Countryside Partnership has secured funding from Highways England to carry out habitat improvements resulting in Biodiversity Net Gain at Telegraph Hill, Higham. We have also carried out a series of events and activities for Sevenoaks District

Council over the summer holidays, aimed at changing residents' behaviour relating to climate change, and forming more eco-friendly habits.

- 3.11 The Kent Downs AONB team's Darent Valley Landscape Partnership has been delivering new natural flood and drought management projects in the Darent catchment with more planned next year; these projects reduce the likelihood of flood while also enhancing nature and landscape quality. In addition, the Farming in Protected Landscape scheme mentioned above has a focus nature-based solutions to climate change on enhancing nature across the Kent Downs.
- 3.12 There is a sustained increase in use of footpaths, green spaces, country parks and public rights of way (PRoW) from the initial lockdown, and both of the latter two KCC services have benefited from significant investment to repair, renew and improve access for the public through utilising Contain Outbreak Management Funding. KCC services have worked together with a number of external partners to provide marketing and campaigns which complement each other, including: to encourage users of public rights of way to respect as well as enjoy the PRoW network and countryside; to support those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic to access green space for good health; and a campaign involving production of a suite of films to encourage behaviour change relating to energy and low emissions.

4. COP26 Goal #3: Mobilise finance

- 4.1 Developed countries must⁷ make good on their promise to mobilise at least \$100bn in climate finance per year by 2020. International financial institutions must play their part and need to work towards unleashing the trillions in private and public sector finance required to secure global net zero.⁸
- 4.2 Before KCC made its commitment in July 2020 to an accelerated target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 for its own estate and services, we commissioned Laser Energy to establish the outline costs and feasibility of achieving this. Laser estimated that reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2030 would cost around £27m to achieve by 2030 but would bring a return of £96m by 2050 in saved costs and income generation.
- 4.3 As introduced in paragraph 2.4, an initial portfolio bid of projects were prepared which meant in December 2020 we were able to act quickly to apply for and gain grant funding of £20.6m from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for projects that will deliver a further reduction of 40% in KCC's carbon emissions by March 2022. We also secured a further £1.2m for schools-based projects.

⁷ As taken directly from [COP26 Goals - UN Climate Change Conference \(COP26\) at the SEC – Glasgow 2021 \(ukcop26.org\)](https://www.ukcop26.org/)

⁸ COP26 Goals are those stated on the [COP26 website](https://www.ukcop26.org/)

- 4.4 The KCC Ecological Advice Service (EAS) continues to provide ecological planning advice to the county's planning authorities. We now provide ecological advice to all but two of the planning authorities (Dover and Tunbridge Wells, who both have in-house ecologists). The service is expected to generate over £100,000 in 2021/22. Business development for the service includes the development of a chargeable pre-application advice service and the expansion of the current service provision to support the delivery of biodiversity net gain within planning.
- 4.5 We continue to work closely with the South East Nature Partnership and are working on an Accelerating Nature-based Climate Solutions project. Funded by the Sector Support Fund, this project is looking at how we can accelerate the emergence of a new 'market-place' for nature-based solution projects which will support clean growth by providing carbon-offsetting solutions. The project is due to conclude late spring/early summer 2022.
- 4.6 From 2020 to 2030 KCC has identified an annual £1million for our Climate Change Fund to support our ambition to reach net zero for our estate by 2030.

5. COP26 Goal #4: Work together to deliver

- 5.1 We can only rise to the challenges of the climate crisis by working together. At COP26 world leaders will be looking to the British Government to:
- finalise the Paris Rulebook (the detailed rules that make the Paris Agreement operational)
 - accelerate action to tackle the climate crisis through collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society⁹.
- 5.2 Working together effectively across KCC is essential to our success in achieving ambitious environmental targets. We have integrated our Net Zero and environmental ambitions within the policy framework to ensure there is alignment and cohesion across the organisation. We are examined annually across different services each time to retain our certification for ISO 14001 – the internationally agreed Environmental Standard. Externally we seek partnerships and collaboration to pool resources and skills, extend our reach and achieve the greatest impact.
- 5.3 The Energy and Low Emission Strategy (ELES) is an excellent example of working together. The ELES aims to support the public sector across Kent and Medway to play a strong leadership role with regards to challenges and opportunities. It will also facilitate increased and accelerated action and implementation across Kent and Medway. The Strategy was adopted by Kent County Council in July 2020. Since the ELES was published, 14 organisations/groups have endorsed or adopted the Strategy.

⁹ As above

- 5.4 KCC conceived and supports the Kent and Medway Environment Group, chaired by Colin Carmichael, Chief Executive of Canterbury City Council. Consisting of senior leaders from across Kent's public and voluntary partners, this group's key purpose is achievement of the county's Net Zero by 2050 target.
- 5.5 KCC is leading on the development, testing and rollout of a comprehensive climate change impact assessment and social value framework for public sector decision making, with associated policies, guidance, training, and support. This will develop a consistent approach across Kent and Medway, to assess, manage and mitigate environmental impacts resulting from public sector policies, strategies, service delivery, commissioning, and procurement. The final product is due at the end of 2021 for roll out in 2022.
- 5.6 A refreshed Kent Design Guide in digital format is in development to replace the 2005 printed version. The refreshed guide aims to ensure there is a county level framework for design quality in building development, including sustainability and renewable energy. This will ensure climate change, energy, air quality and environmental considerations are integrated into Local Plans, policies, and developments, by developing a clean growth strategic planning policy and guidance framework for Kent and Medway, to drive down emissions and mainstream climate resilience. The aim is to have the web site publicly available and ready for use by Spring 2022.
- 5.7 KCC will also be incorporating the protection and enhancement of biodiversity and adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change in the latest iteration of its Minerals and Waste Local Plan.
- 5.8 A comprehensive Kent Environmental Communications and Engagement strategy has been developed and agreed with partners. It is designed to ensure a collaborative approach to communications, under the banner 'Kent Green Action', across Kent and Medway. The action plan includes creating a social media calendar, engaging our staff, sharing our stories via press releases and awards submissions, and engaging with local communities. This enables a comprehensive communications, engagement and behaviour change programme targeted at residents, employees, businesses, and visitors. Supporting a partnership approach to communication and engagement through Kent Green Action means maximised efficiencies and resources, but also creates material that is more impactful and far-reaching.
- 5.9 KCC will once again be running the annual Kent Environment Strategy (KES) Conference, based around the themes of COP26, to raise the profile of our work, showcase exemplars, and further the local partnerships and collaborative working that is already underway. It will take place on 2nd November with up to 100 delegates in person and up to 300 online with a recording available for general viewing afterwards. Last year's online conference was a huge success with over 350 attendees and presentations from Lord Deben and Greg Clark MP. Events such as the KES Conference are important for demonstrating progress, informing both partners and the public of the work that is under way, and of celebrating success. Increasing

the visibility of our innovation, commitment, and progress towards Net Zero will also inspire more action and support future partnerships and funding opportunities.

- 5.10 KCC's Plan Bee was adopted by Full Council in July 2019. It is chaired by Sean Holden and there are a further 15 Members on the group, with good cross-party representation. In May 2021, a new Facebook page for Kent's Plan Bee was launched, which has proven really popular, with over 950 people following the page in just the first month and its posts reaching over 114,000 people, with 15,000 people engaging in those posts by liking, commenting, or sharing.
- 5.11 A public survey was also conducted to better understand people's perceptions of pollinators and what action they would support. The survey received 4,655 responses and showed that:
- There is good general understanding of pollination and there is a very strong understanding of the causes of pollinator decline and the possible consequences of such a decline.
 - There is a strong preference for less-frequently cut grassland in public spaces and road verges, although a much smaller group did highlight concerns about issues relating to weeds, driver-visibility, tidiness, and litter.
 - There was strong support shown for wilder verges, wild spaces generally and flower-rich grassland in urban as well as rural settings

6. Policy Framework

- 6.1 The environment is one of the five main Challenges set out in the Interim Strategic Plan that KCC is delivering. Tackling the climate emergency is identified as an urgent priority.

7. Equalities Impact assessment

- 7.1 Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken as on a project-by-project basis.

8. General Data Protection Regulation considerations

- 8.1 Where personal data is to be processed for an individual project to deliver a Data Protection Impact Assessment was/will be completed.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Kent has much to be proud of in its mission to reach Net Zero. Our work has been ongoing for many years but there is greater public, political and media interest than ever as COP26 brings renewed focus on the environment. This is an important opportunity to capitalise on the momentum and showcase all that we have already achieved and what we are working towards.

- 9.2 There are enormous challenges ahead but we have robust, evidence-based plans in place and we will continue to make progress, demonstrate strong leadership, work inclusively and collaboratively across many sectors, and make our impact even more visible.
- 9.3 Together we are stimulating the economy and creating sustainable jobs and also improving air quality and public health. We are mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss to protect our environments for future generations, and we have even greater aspirations for the next decade.

10. Recommendations

1. Cabinet to note KCC's work date and future plans on the Environment.
2. Cabinet to consider in the light of COP26 what more might be done across KCC and with partners to help us achieve the COP26 targets.

11. Contact details

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