

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 6 January 2022.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr D L Brazier, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford and Mrs S Prendergast

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr N Abrahams (Area Education Officer – West Kent), Mrs A Beer (Corporate Director of People and Communications), Mr D Cockburn (Corporate Director Strategic & Corporate Services), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director of Children Young People and Education), Dr A Duggal (Deputy Director of Public Health), Mrs C McInnes, Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Formal apologies were received from Miss Carey but she would attend the meeting via virtual link.

2. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 3)

Mrs Chandler – Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services

(1) Mrs Chandler updated members on the improvements being made to the ways in which parental requests for Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments for children and young people were managed. The changes had been made in response to feedback received from parents, schools and other partners about the current system. This change would provide a digital record of each request submitted, improve completion rates within statutory timescales and help to ensure that schools were fully involved in the process.

(2) Mrs Chandler explained that, with regards to Reconnect, 62 Holiday Activity Fund provisions had been delivered offering 3139 places to children and young people. Additional e-vouchers were also provided for those requested via Social Workers and Early Help Workers for those children who were not in receipt of Free School Meals. Early indications were that 47 provisions were showing 80% or more take up and positive feedback had been received on the Reconnect and Holiday Activity Fund. In terms of the locality grants, Round 2 was successfully operated and Round 3 which sought to deliver activity for summer 2022 was launched on 5th January.

(3) The Christmas Campaign for Care Leavers raised £23,000, providing over 2,000 Care Leavers in Kent with a gift at Christmas, Mrs Chandler thanked all those who donated.

Mrs Prendergast – Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

(4) Mrs Prendergast informed members that the Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, had written an open letter to education and childcare leaders on the return to education settings in 2022. In his letter, he acknowledged the huge commitment from all in the sector in continuing to care for and provide high quality education, care and pastoral support for children and young people. He emphasised the need to keep children and young people attending settings and school, and the importance of face-to-face teaching, except in exceptional circumstances. The related guidance by the DfE supported this. In light of the Omicron variant surge, the government was temporarily recommending that face coverings be worn in classrooms and teaching spaces for all students in Year 7 and above. The advice was short term only – until 26th January – to support both pupils and teachers during this time and builds on the proportionate guidance that recommends face coverings for all adults in communal areas of all settings.

(5) Mrs Prendergast also explained that the rules around self-isolation had changed and in addition, for a temporary period from the start of January, Ofsted would not ask schools, colleges or early years leaders who were also Ofsted Inspectors to undertake inspections – leaving them to focus entirely on their leadership responsibilities at this critical time.

(6) In relation to vaccinations, NHS England had asked that all eligible students be offered a second dose of the vaccine before the February half term. At the same time, the NHS has also stated that no other programmes could be put at risk through the delivery of the covid vaccines, and the School Immunisation Service was also rolling out a parallel Human Papillomavirus Vaccination programme.

(7) Mrs Prendergast also referred to the winter planning in place for education settings. The guidance issued by the Department for Education was that “*Schools should, wherever possible, stay open in severe weather. They play a key role in their communities and by staying open help both the pupils and parents*”.

(8) Mrs Prendergast thanked all staff in schools, colleges and early years settings for everything they did to provide children and young people with a high-quality education and offering them care and support in some very challenging circumstances.

Mr Brazier – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

(9) Mr Brazier explained that the Council’s Winter Plan was proceeding successfully, there had been several instances of gritting already and efforts would be intensified over the next couple of weeks with the cold weather. Meetings had been held with Southern Water regarding sink holes which, when they appeared in the highway, could cause road closures and inconvenience. Discussions were being had about ways in which potential sink holes could be detected before they caused a problem, the necessary technology did exist to detect potential sink holes but it was currently prohibitively expensive. KCC enjoyed a close relationship with Southern

Water which resulted in a quick response to sink holes. KCC had been approached by Southern Water about their project named the Storm Overflow Task Force. There would be a seminar outlining the problems of flooding in Kent, how it concerned the council and its Members. Given the heavy rainfall in recent years there had been problems with sewage adding to the problems caused by flooding. Southern Water were undertaking pathfinder trials in Swalecliffe, Margate and Deal involving new infrastructure separating sewage from the highways drainage infrastructure. The loss of natural drainage had caused problems and smartwater harvesting was being used with an intention to reduce storm water overflows by 80% before 2030 in the selected areas which would be of great benefit to Kent Highways and there would be further discussion about the cost of this work and its funding.

Mr Murphy – Cabinet Member for Economic Development

(10) Mr Murphy updated members on the Dover Port Health Authority; this had attracted just under £12million investment from central government and was due to generate 200 employees, 100 of which had already been recruited, the majority of which were local people. To put this into perspective 900,000 consignments were expected through the port of Dover with checks being done at Dover. Discussions had been had with Transport to ensure that this didn't lead to blockages.

(11) A meeting had been held with Aylesham District Council Workshop Trust who were interested in building 28 commercial units on the Aylesham site with the assistance of a grant from the Kent and Medway Business Fund.

(12) In relation to Kent's partnership organisations, Mr Murphy explained that Visit Kent was running a marketing campaign to make people aware of the grants available to the hospitality industry. With regards to area development in Dungeness joint meetings had been held to investigate the potential for the Dungeness site being used for new Rolls Royce's new reactors.

(13) With regards to phase three of the Broadband roll out across Kent this had been instructed and work was being done to ensure that broadband was reaching those who needed it.

Mr Mike Hill – Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

(14) Mr Hill updated members on the John Downton Young People's Arts Awards in Kent which had been held as a virtual event on 9 December 2021. There was a large attendance from young people, parents and teachers with 342 entries from 31 schools of an extremely high standard. The winners would be exhibited at the Turner Contemporary gallery.

Mr Sweetland – Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement, People and Partnerships

(15) Mr Sweetland stated that a lot of work was still focussing on the pandemic, helping people to stay safe and protect themselves and friends and family. In line with Government recommendations KCC was asking staff who can to work from home and managers were being asked to review risk assessments for their teams. Although absence rates were rising service provision had not had to be radically reduced. Service users and residents would be alerted via kent.gov should the

situation change. KCC was supporting the Government and the NHS around the critical need for vaccination and the booster jab.

(16) In addition to protecting key workers and promoting vaccination, information had been made available about road safety, mental health, recycling, scams and fostering. This successful campaign had reached around 500,000 people. Mr Sweetland offered his thanks to KCC staff and wished them a very happy new year.

Mr Oakford – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services

(17) Mr Oakford confirmed that the draft budget had been published for 2022/23 and the financial plan for the next three years. Producing a draft balanced budget had been far more challenging than previous years and Mr Oakford thanked the finance team for the huge work needed to develop the budget. He also recognised and thanked the Corporate Management Team for recognising the challenges and for working together to produce a draft budget we can all be proud of.

Mrs Bell – Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

(18) Mrs Bell explained that positive Covid cases had continued to rise and were around double the highest point seen in January 2021. Recent sequencing results suggested that Omicron accounted for 99% of cases at the moment. People aged 20-45 had the highest case rates although this was expected to change with schools returning. Cases in those aged 65+ had shown the largest increases and had almost doubled in the last week. Cases among care home residents had also increased. Hospital admissions had increased to around 30 per day. Booster doses saw a rise in the lead up to Christmas but uptake had been slow since then. At 3rd January 58.3% of those aged 12 and above have had a booster dose which was higher than the national average. The supply of home Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs) was improving, confirmatory PCR tests were being temporarily suspended and were no longer needed after a positive LFT. In addition it was now possible to end self-isolation after 7 days after two negative LFTs taken 24 hours apart.

(19) There were a number of public health campaigns underway, these included the national Better Health Smoke Free campaign which was encouraging adult smokers to quit for their own health as well as reducing the chances of their children becoming smokers. Details of the campaign were available on kent.gov.uk/smokefree. An alcohol awareness campaign was launched last November and would be launched again for Dry January, again information was available on KCC's website. Kent Healthy Weight Support campaign was supported by One You Kent to help people lose weight and get active.

(20) The Leader congratulated Barbara Cooper MBE on her recognition in the Queen's New Years Honours for services to transport and the Covid-19 response. Mr Hill also added his congratulations to Darren Smart (Libraries, Registrars and Archives) on being awarded a BEM for services to public libraries. Congratulations were offered to all Kent residents who were honoured in the New Year.

3. Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2022-23

(Item 4)

(1) Mr Oakford confirmed that the provisional Local Government Settlement was received on 16 December 2021 containing £4.2million more than the mid range of expectations. A three-year settlement was expected but it was, in reality, a one-year settlement.

(2) Dave Shipton introduced the report and explained that the provisional settlement was close to the upper range of expectations reported to Cabinet after the Spending Review in October, the final settlement was expected late January/early February. The provisional settlement included the additional £1.6billion for local government. Of the £1.6billion, £700million had been allocated to authorities according to the formula for social care, the vast majority being allocated by the existing Social Care Support Grant although it was noted that this formula was out of date. Mr Shipton gave further details of the grant allocations for individual authorities from Department for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities. Mr Shipton explained that the Government was still looking at options to support local authorities through transitional protection as part of reforms to local government funding over the coming years. The one-off Services Grant provided in the Local Government Finance Settlement would be excluded from potential transitional protections. Mr Shipton confirmed that in order to balance the budget the Council was having to find £38million of spending reduction and income.

(3) The Leader queried whether, given KCC was already looking at a situation where there was an increase in overall grant for 2022/23 and then flat after that, alongside the implications of the one-year settlement and the review of fair funding, how would this look in years two and three? There were questions for authorities like KCC relating to the Government Grant for years two and three. Mr Shipton explained that the Council was working on a prudent assumption regarding the grant for years two and three.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the settlement and impact on the Council's budget and agree that the response is prepared in consultation with the Leader/Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for Finance and Traded Services.

4. Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2022-2026

(Item 5)

(1) Mrs Prendergast introduced the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent. This was the latest edition of the 5 year rolling plan for Kent as a strategic commissioner of education. The Plan built on the positive achievements of previous years to fulfil the Council's statutory responsibilities and non-statutory commitments to facilitate parental choice. This was not easy with the demand for specialist places increasing.

(2) Mrs Prendergast explained that she had met with all 12 district leaders and colleagues to present the plan which was generally very well received and all colleagues praised the good working relationship with KCC officers. The Commissioning Plan had previously been endorsed by Children's Young People and Education Cabinet Committee in November 2021.

(3) Mr Abrahams explained that the Commissioning Plan was produced every year and was largely built on a forecast for the number of children who would need a school place. The year's forecast showed a continuation of the trends observed over the past few years with a decrease in births in the county since 2012 mirroring the national picture. In the short to medium term the plans for additional provision were in response to localised pressures and the increase in demand for secondary school places. The longer term was forecasting a change in an upwards direction with an increase in the numbers of young people in Kent, in the main due to housing growth in recent years and projected in the future.

(4) The Leader commented on the underlying demographic pressure which would peak over the next few years and then the balance tipping towards housing pressures, the links with developer contributions and any future systems to secure levels of funding from developers.

(5) In response to a question about provision for special educational needs Mr Abrahams confirmed that the Commissioning Plan outlined a forecast for the number of children and young people expected to have an EHCP in the future given past trends. These numbers were a significant increase, the short term plan included commissioning additional provision to meet the expected need with anticipated changes in the need for provision in the longer term linking to the SEND strategy and the inclusion of children within mainstream settings; this was being monitored alongside inclusion work.

(6) Mrs Chandler commented that the Commissioning Plan contained capacity in mainstream schools for pupils with SEND. It was important to address the numbers forecast and the need for additional SEND places. It was also important to ensure that, where appropriate, children could benefit from education within a mainstream school, whilst bearing in mind that there would always be children for whom mainstream wasn't appropriate. There was work going on in this area to ensure the education provision for those children was the best that could be provided with an emphasis on early identification and early support. Mrs Chandler also emphasised the commitment to small schools which were a significant part of communities in rural areas, KCC had a continued commitment to support these small schools with the challenges they were facing.

(7) Mr Murphy emphasised the point that S106 contributions would become more and more difficult, but this was being looked at carefully.

(8) The Leader thanked Mr Abrahams and Mrs Prendergast for the high-quality Plan submitted to Cabinet and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that Cabinet agree the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2022-26.