

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 31 March 2022.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Prendergast.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 3 March 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said that there were very high case rates of Covid-19 both in Kent and nationally. While there were rising hospital admissions, there were low rates of critical care admissions. Universal Covid-19 testing was to cease and there were concerns about the loss of the granularity of the local picture. It was felt that the true case rates of Covid-19 were higher than reported due to the fall in testing and tests not being available. Case rates in Kent were higher than the average for England and case numbers were highest in middle-aged adults.

As set out in the government's plan for living with Covid, it was expected that it would be managed regionally and locally as part of a wider 'all hazards' approach – using existing health protection frameworks.

All testing regimes, infection prevention and control measures set up in care homes and hospitals were to continue but the government would no longer provide free universal symptomatic and symptom-free testing from 1 April 2022. The council-managed test centres at Ashford and in Maidstone were to close on 31 March 2022. Thanks were given to all the staff involved with setting up and operating the test centres across Kent.

National guidance released on 29 March listed groups of those who were to have access to symptomatic testing, including patients in hospital and staff and residents in high-risk settings including care homes, extra care and hospices. People were to be tested when they were discharged from hospitals into care

homes and hospices. Non-symptomatic testing was to continue in some high-risk settings where infection can spread rapidly.

Following the Care Summit at the beginning of March, it had been noted that virtual attendees had not been part of the discussion sessions in the afternoon. An additional workshop was held on 23 March to capture the visions and experiences of the virtual attendees. A workshop was planned for 21 April to co-develop ideas from the Summit into actions and planning would start for the next Care Summit in 2023.

2) Mrs Chandler gave an update relating to her portfolio and gave an update on behalf of Mrs Prendergast.

With regard to the Schools White paper, KCC welcomed the Department for Education's new pledges to provide the right support to children and young people in the right place at the right time so they could achieve their potential.

The Opportunity for All White Paper promised a range of support for the education system post Covid, building on existing best practice in schools. KCC was already working on a ground-breaking project with the Education Endowment Fund and looked forward to extending this further.

The key areas for change included pupil achievement, behaviour and attendance and school organisation.

KCC was committed to making Kent a county working for all children and reforms helping KCC work together to deliver outstanding outcomes for children, especially the most vulnerable, were welcomed. The evidence showed that pupils benefited from schools and trusts working collaboratively and KCC warmly welcomed the government's commitment to creating families of schools which built on what is best in the maintained and academy systems.

The government's SEND Green Paper was published on 29 March and had significant links with the Schools White Paper. There were three key challenges facing the SEND system identified in the Green Paper:

- 1) outcomes for children and young people with SEN or in alternative provision were poor;
- 2) navigating the SEND system and alternative provision was not a positive experience for children, young people and their families; and
- 3) despite unprecedented investment, the system was not delivering value for money for children, young people and families.

The Paper contained proposals for greater inclusion in mainstream schools for children with SEND, early intervention with an emphasis on early years and co-production with parents and carers. These proposals were welcomed and were part of the improvement work being done within KCC with partners. Also welcomed was the greater investment in some elements of SEND and greater clarity around roles and responsibilities. It was also considered positive that councils as convenors of local SEN systems were to be able to bring education and health partners 'to the table' where everyone was accountable for provision. Having a collective responsibility was to be crucial in delivering a system that

worked for children and their families. Whilst there was some legislative change in the national systems and frameworks proposed, it was disappointing that there was no fundamental change to the current systems within the proposals. The reforms would take time to implement but, in many cases, KCC was already working towards what was proposed. In the meantime, there was an urgent need to address the financial sustainability of the system.

The associated consultation was to close on 1 July 2023 and Members, schools and other settings, parents and young people were encouraged to engage in the consultation and to respond to the Green Paper.

It was announced that Reconnect had been shortlisted as a finalist for the Local Government Chronicle Awards under the Children's Services category. This achievement was a recognition of the hard work and dedication of the thousands of volunteers, children's workers, clubs and organisations, schools, partners and KCC staff who had embraced Reconnect and driven its successes. Thanks were given to all involved.

On 24 March, Reconnect hosted its Hackathon, with teams from schools and youth hubs across Kent tasked with the challenge of developing ideas to engage children and young people in the battle against climate change and to ensure their voices were heard loudly in our county. Bio-joy-versity, students from Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School were judged to have the winning idea, and were awarded £8,000 to implement their idea. Palm Bay Primary School and Homewood's teams took second and third place prizes respectively. Feedback from schools indicated how inspired the students were by the day, how they relished the challenge and how committed they were to putting their plans in place, regardless of whether they were prize winners.

It had been announced that the county had been invited to take part in The Kent Big Writing Challenge, with a prize-giving ceremony at Canterbury Cathedral in August 2023. The theme of the challenge, which was being organised and promoted by KCC's Reconnect programme in conjunction with the KM Charity Team, was "local heroes". The competition which launched on Friday 25 March was open to children and young people who live or go to school in Kent and entries, which had a limit of 500 words, needed to have been received by 31 May.

Food vouchers were to be provided over the Easter holidays by KCC for families whose children were entitled to benefits-related Free School Meals, as well as a free Holiday Activities and Food programme for eligible children, funded by the Department for Education. More information was to be disseminated from the KCC Reconnect programme and was available on the KCC website.

Mrs Chandler attended this year's Spirit of Try Angle Awards which took place at Port Lympne Safari Park on 27 March. The ceremony was opened by Sir Roger Gale, MP for North and Thanet and who was also a Trustee of the Try Angle Foundation and was presented by three young people from Kent Youth Voice. Congratulations were given to all involved in organising the spectacular event and congratulations were given to all young people who collected awards.

3) Mr Brazier said that KCC was planning to apply to the Department for Transport (DfT) for Part 6 powers to enforce moving traffic offences and there was a consultation.

A Members' briefing had been attended by 36 Members who were briefed on what to expect when the 7 trial locations for the scheme went live. The scheme was based on AMPR technology and was expected to pay for itself and for its expansion.

Mr Brazier, alongside officers had attended the Prince Michael International Road Safety Awards reception at the Royal Automobile Club in London, where awards had been presented by Prince Michael of Kent. KCC won an award and the Prince had referred to KCC's launch event for Vision Zero at Manston last year.

A consultation was live on the budget proposals to withdraw from supporting 48 bus services that had become poor value for money and unaffordable. The consultation had attracted media attention and Mr Brazier had spoken on radio and television. A difficult business environment had been created by the Covid-19 pandemic and there had been sharp contractions in the range of services run commercially by operators such as Arriva and Stagecoach. These were not services supported by KCC but residents had looked to KCC to support the services. KCC was unable to provide this support as the funding was not available.

It had been announced that KCC was to increase the cost of the Kent Travel Saver bus pass. Public opinion had been somewhat moderated by KCC's ability to leave the cost of the low income, sibling and carer passes unchanged.

Mr Brazier, the Leader and officers were to meet a company who had proposals to construct a lorry park between Maidstone and Ashford. After many years with a lack of proper facilities for lorry parking, the use of laybys and the use of other unsuitable places by hauliers, there was clear commercial interest in the sector and there were several lorry parks in the county, including the expanded Ashford Truck Stop. KCC was aware of planning applications for other developments of this kind.

There had been a trial of a commercial e-scooter service in Canterbury. This had been encouraged by the DfT who believed that micro-mobility was the way forward away from cars in towns and cities. The scooters were able to be used on the public highway. The trial in Canterbury had started in November 2020 with a consultation. A second consultation was launched on 3 June 2021 and there was a live facility on the KCC website to allow local people to comment. Consent had been given for a final extension of the trial until November 2022, when the DfT were to assess its success and the operators were to decide whether to make further investments in infrastructure. The scooters were demonstrably safe as they were considered to be of good quality and their speed was regulated. Scooter hirers needed to have a driving licence and an account with the operators, Bird. There had been very few accidents and no serious accidents had been reported.

4) Miss Carey said that same day bookings were introduced across all 18 Household Waste and Recycling Centres in Kent on 8 March 2022. The decision had been made to retain the booking system and it was to be used as the basis for further improvements to customer services. The booking system had already given many environmental benefits including increased recycling at the centres themselves

There had been a visit from Lord Deben, Chairman of the UK's independent Committee on Climate Change and some of his team of officers. There was a tour of Kent and Medway which began at 9am in Margate and ended at 9pm in Chatham. On the tour, they saw the work that was being done in Kent on the environment by KCC and with partners. As part of the tour, there was a visit to a school in Herne Bay and young people had an opportunity to engage in conversation with Lord Deben. The visit to Kent was one of 12 visits the Committee on Climate Change was undertaking.

Miss Carey had been invited to help judge the Hackathon mentioned in the update given by Mrs Chandler. There were some outstanding ideas and she hoped to work together with the prize winners from Simon Langton Girls'.

On 28 March 2022, Miss Carey took a decision on behalf of KCC to purchase a 21-megawatt solar park in the West Country. The single investment which was made with KCC's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant meant KCC would be able to reduce carbon emissions by 30% in a year and there would be a saving to KCC of a minimum of £760,000 every year for the next 40 years. KCC's other solar park was at Kings Hill so there had been experience of both buying a solar park and building one on KCC's land. Thanks were given to all the officers involved.

Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler and Mrs Game went to Sandwich Junior School to attend the first planting of trees as part of the Queen's Green Canopy. 1786 trees were to be planted, representing a tree for every child in care in Kent. It was also part of KCC's Plan Tree Strategy.

5) Mr Murphy said that he attended the Straits Committee on behalf of KCC on 22 March. The importance of the Straits Committee to KCC was stressed. KCC sponsored two projects which were approved by the Committee. Project 3i was to establish an open access web-based database of 'Net Zero' regional, environmental research conducted by the 3i network of universities: Université de Lille, Ghent University, KU Leuven and the University of Kent. This project linked the university sector with the public sector on 'Net Zero' issues, linked regional students with ongoing research and provided businesses with a resource network to understand how they can achieve 'Net Zero' targets.

The second project 'Fallsify', was related to health and safety and was to test an innovative method and platform of preventing falls with the elderly which had been successfully tested in Denmark and Norway. It had both a positive social and economic impact. Pilot projects were to be used in Ghent, Flanders and Kent.

There had been calls with the British embassies in Paris and Brussels, working with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office to understand issues

that would affect Kent. A virtual meeting had been scheduled with the two embassies to develop this and to promote investment.

A new scheme was being worked on with Pas-de-Calais in Hauts-de-France to put pressure on the French and British governments to get the Eurostar to stop in Ashford and Calais-Fréthun, which was important to both economies.

A close watch was to be kept on the issues concerning the London Resort. It was understood that the LRCH Consortium was to submit a new scheme for the London Resort before the end of the year.

KCC had been fast to react to the news regarding P&O Ferries and a joint letter had been sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer from KCC, Dover District Council (DDC) and Natalie Elphicke, MP, expressing concern and stressing the importance of the Strait of Dover to the economy of Kent. Work had been undertaken with DDC and a jobs fair for former P&O crew and staff was to be held at the end of April. Some crew had since been employed by other companies.

Efforts had been renewed in resolving the Stodmarsh issue, where poor water quality levels had stalled housing developments across east Kent. A paper was being put together in order to seek engagement from central government to find a resolution.

6) Mr Hill said that a 75-kilometre section of the England Coastal Path between the Isle of Grain and Woolwich had opened on 12 January 2022. There were 3 national trails in Kent and it was felt that this had extended recreation opportunities to Kent residents and increased the offer to tourists.

The temporary library in Tunbridge Wells had been closed and the library was to re-open on 28 April 2022 at The Amelia. The project had been a partnership between Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and KCC. A new library, museum, art gallery, adult education centre and gateway services were to be housed in the same building.

In the Paralympics, Millie Knight achieved a bronze medal in her third Paralympics. Congratulations were given to her for her achievement.

A new 3 storey skate park had opened in the Creative Quarter in Folkestone. Mr Hill and Miss Carey had visited the facility and it was felt that the facility offered great opportunities for young people.

7) Mr Sweetland said that KCC had actively worked with its partners to provide immediate support and assistance to the first Ukrainians arriving in Kent and ensured Ukrainian refugees received warm welcome. KCC was ready to provide help to new arrivals and to host families. The offer was to include advice and support to access the relevant services.

The KCC website had been updated with information regarding what KCC was doing to support Ukrainians and how residents could also offer support. The website had information about how to donate to the British Red Cross appeal as well as signposting to other useful websites. The KCC Contact Centre had also

been briefed. The Contact Centre also offered a translation service as part of its regular service and they had been alerted that there might be a higher requirement for this.

8) Mr Oakford said 1 April was the last day of the financial year and it had been anticipated that a significant overspend would be carried over. It was hoped that the final results would show an improvement on the overspend.

Thanks were given to officers and the performance of the Director of Infrastructure and Property Team was acknowledged. This group of officers were responsible for the disposal of surplus properties at the highest price to the benefit of taxpayer. The Team was focussed and had done an outstanding job selling as much surplus property as they could in order to support KCC's capital programme for the coming year.

There were substantial inflationary pressures on KCC's capital programme, including huge inflation on building materials and even higher inflation on the energy used to produce building materials.

Thanks were given for the tremendous efforts of officers in completing the purchase of the solar park and Kent was to benefit from the solar park for many years ahead.

4. Quarterly Performance Report 2021/2022 Quarter 3 (Item 5)

Rachel Kennard, Chief Analyst was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Rachel Kennard outlined the report for Quarter 3, reporting results until the end of December 2021. Overall, the position was positive. 27 of the KPIs were 'RAG' rated as green, 3 rated as amber and 3 performing below target rated as red.
- 2) The 3 areas that had been 'RAG' rated as red were the same as in Quarter 2:
 - Under Customer Services, percentage of calls to Contact Point which were answered. The percentage of calls answered had improved to 87%. However, in December, 96% of calls had been answered and figures for January show the same percentage were answered.
 - In Quarter 2, 75% of complaints had been responded to within timescale which was below the floor standard of 80%. There had been a further decline in performance, as 72% had been responded to within timescale.
 - There had been an improvement for the KPI under Children, Young People and Education, 'ECHPs issued within 20 weeks'. While performance had been below the floor standard for some time, there had been improvements in each quarter of 2021-22. This KPI was expected to continue to improve.
- 3) Further positive points from the report were noted:

- 11 indicators showed a statistically significant improving trend which indicated sustained improvement over a period of 6 quarters. Only 4 KPIs had shown significant deterioration.

4) It was also noted during Members' discussion of the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report:

- There was likely to be an increase in people requiring mental health support relating to the war in Ukraine.
- The good work of the No Use Empty Initiative was highlighted.
- The KPIs were reviewed annually to establish indicators which best captured the work being done by KCC.

5) Resolved that the Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 be noted.

5. KCC Budget - Updated Financial Risks

(Item 6)

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director, Finance was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report and updated Members regarding the impact of rate of inflation and the war in Ukraine on KCC's budget.

The rate of inflation had more than doubled since July 2021 and was continuing to grow. The Bank of England had forecast that the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation rate would be around 8% in April 2022.

Inflation had a significant impact on KCC's budget but also on the providers of services commissioned by KCC. Around £1.3 billion of KCC's total spend was directly impacted by inflation. It had been well publicised that the increase in energy costs was to have an impact on everyone within Europe.

Reductions in equity values had impacted on the capital values of KCC's longer term investments and pension funds. It was anticipated these values would rise again and advice was being sought.

Interest rates had risen but the vast majority of KCC's external borrowing was secured at long-term fixed rates. Provided KCC did not need to borrow more money, the situation was secure.

2) Ms Cooke said it was not certain what the risks would be around developments internationally. However, there had been adverse impact on an already challenging budget. Officers would continue to work to achieve a balanced budget but close monitoring was to be incredibly important in the coming year.

3) Miss Carey said more should be done to increase the number of solar parks and it was felt that there were opportunities at closed landfill sites in Kent. It was considered

that this had the potential to benefit KCC's financial position and meet its environmental goals.

4) RESOLVED to note and agreed the recommendations as outlined in the report.

6. KCC Share of Retained Business Rates and Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2022-23

(Item 7)

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director, Finance was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report.

2) Ms Cooke said that information regarding the retained business rates and final local government finance settlement had been received late and the information had not been received from central government at the time of publishing papers for the Budget meeting of County Council. The figures constituted KCC's estimated share of business rates. There had been agreement at the meeting of County Council to agree amendments.

It was proposed and agreed at the meeting to continue to retain a 5% general reserve policy. It was proposed to add £430,000 to maintain 5% of the net budget in general reserves. Cabinet were asked to agree that the remainder of around £8 million be allocated to risk reserves, to cover potentially higher inflation challenges in parts of KCC's supply chain and the potential impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

3) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.

7. Ukraine Refugee Resettlement Scheme Update

(Item 8)

Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure was in attendance for this item.

1) The Leader and Mr Hill introduced the report.

2) Ms Spore said the response to the humanitarian crisis as a result of the war in Ukraine from Kent residents had been extraordinary, with people supporting aid and making applications to the 'Homes for Ukraine Scheme'. This was the formal scheme being run alongside the 'Extended Family Scheme'.

The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) structures had been established, enabling multi-agency partners to come together and to establish a 'command and control' structure, also ensuring central government engagement. Alongside visa checks undertaken by the Home Office, there were checks that needed to be completed at a local level. DBS and Enhanced DBS checks and home checks were required to support the scheme. The KRF was working across all organisations to support hosts and guests. Checks were being progressed and sponsor applicants were to be contacted. Host home checks were being undertaken by district councils. It was emphasised that safeguarding was key in these processes and checks.

All services and partners working through the KRF were ready to support the needs of individuals and to help coordinate activities relating to the scheme. Information was being updated daily and being shared through communications channels.

Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted:

- It was important that the DBS and home checks were brought forward. There had been frustration due to the speed of processing the sponsor applications to the resettlement scheme. Sponsor households were being contacted directly regarding the DBS checks.
- Safeguarding was to be embedded in the processes.
- The process around the scheme was to be systemised and surge capacity was to be developed into 'business as usual'.
- Challenges around relationship breakdown and homelessness issues were acknowledged. KCC's partners were focussed on making contingency arrangements in order to address this.
- Work was being undertaken with health authorities and trusts around capacity as it was expected there would be an impact on mental health service requirements and other services.
- Communications had been shared with schools about how to manage some of the issues arising from the war in Ukraine and children coming from conflict zones. Further information was being sought from central government.

3) The Leader thanked the Director of Infrastructure, the Director for People and Communications and officers in the Communications Team. Key processes were being put in place but there would be longer term issues to resolve.

4) RESOLVED to note the update.