

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 30 March 2023.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Prendergast. Mr Hill was in attendance virtually.

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 26 January and 7 March 2023

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings on 26 January 2023 and 7 March 2023 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said that Kent residents who keep pigeons or chickens on their property were amongst those being encouraged to register them with the Animal and Plant Health Agency to better protect them from avian influenza. It was noted that while there had been no confirmed cases of bird flu amongst commercial flocks in Kent during the outbreak, there had been cases found in wild birds. Public Health was advising hobby keepers, those with fewer than 50 birds, to voluntarily register as it would allow them to be contacted quicker if there was a local outbreak, helping to protect birds and the national poultry flock.

Mrs Bell said the Government had announced £421 million for local authorities across England over the next 3 years to boost drug and alcohol treatment. The funding would mean that the total local authority funds for treatment would have increased by 40% between 2020/21-2024/25. For Kent, this meant an extra £3 million during the next financial year and then £5 million for each of the following two years. Together with the core grant for drug and alcohol treatment, this would be a total of £13.7 million for 2023/24 for Kent County Council. The additional funding would be used to enable the Council to focus support on homeless individuals into treatment services, maintain the treatment and recovery for those moving into new accommodation and help individuals into employment as part of their treatment.

Mrs Bell said that Kent Adult Social Care had won awards at the Public Sector Transformation Awards on 8 March 2023. Kent Adult Social Care won Bronze for the Best Use of Digital and Technology Award for their Technology Enabled Care Services. Silver for the Transformation of Health and Social Care Award for community micro-enterprises and Gold for the Communications Award for the Kent

Adult Social Care strategy. It was also noted that the Kent Public Health and Strategy Team was successful in the Health Watch Recognition Awards on 29 March 2023 which Mrs Bell had attended. Mrs Bell congratulated and thanked all the staff involved.

2) Mrs Chandler said Dame Rachel de Souza the Children's Commissioner, made a visit to KCC's Reception and Safe Care Service for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people waiting for transfer to other local authority care. The young people spoke about the help, support and care they had received from the team at Millbank and Appledore and how safe they felt. They also had communicated that the delays with the National Transfer Scheme were difficult for the young people and the Children's Commissioner agreed to take this issue up with other local authorities. Thanks were given to the whole team and service who worked with UASC on a daily basis.

On 22 February, Mrs Chandler visited the Front Door Team at Kroner House in Ashford. Mrs Chandler was encouraged by the positive attitudes and level of knowledge shown by staff and how dedicated and determined they were to ensure the safety of Kent's children and young people. It was noted that there was a strong working relationship with colleagues from Kent Police. Improvements in the use of virtual technology since the start of the pandemic had improved participation with other agencies and changed working practices.

Thanks were given to the Front Door team for their continued hard work.

Members were reminded that all had a role to play in ensuring the safeguarding of children in Kent, so should anyone have any concerns about the welfare of a child, they were advised to call 03000 41 11 11 or email social.services@kent.gov.uk and the Front Door team would be on hand to investigate. Where a child was in immediate danger, Members were advised to call 999 in the first instance.

3) Mr Love said that secondary school offer day for children across Kent was on 1 March. A record number of applications were received, totalling 22,620, an increase of over 700 on the previous year.

The number of Kent pupils offered a place at their first-preference school went up by 291 to 14,865 although the percentage had fallen slightly from 79.59% to 78.21%.

However, the number and percentages of those being offered their second, third or fourth choices went up, so the percentage of those allocated a place at a school for which they did not make a preference at all fell to under 5% - the lowest since 2018.

The deadlines for parents to join waiting lists or lodge an appeal had passed and KCC was to hold a second round of offers on Tuesday, 25 April for any spaces that had become available.

Thanks and congratulations were given to the KCC staff in the admissions team who, every year, worked tirelessly to try to meet the secondary school choices of so many pupils and parents. The team were hard at work preparing for primary school offer day which was on Monday, 17 April.

Mr Love and Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director, opened the 'Investing in Inclusion- Securing Future Pathways' conference on Thursday, 23 March, which was aimed at Special Educational Needs Coordinators and Leaders of Inclusion from across the county.

The day featured both plenary and workshop sessions. It was the first time the conference had been organised and there was a fantastic turnout with around 400 SENCOs in attendance.

Three meetings of the Kent SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board had taken place, and the first SEND Scrutiny Sub-Committee had also taken place. Thanks were given to all participants of both the Assurance Board and Scrutiny Sub-Committee for their input.

The next steps included the imminent launch of the SEND Enquiry Hub which aimed to improve the communication pathways for parents and carers.

Christine McInnes had taken up her post as Director of Education and SEND on 24 March following the agreement of the County Council to the senior top tier restructure. Mr Love said that he was looking forward to continuing to work closely with her to tackle the many challenges that Kent was facing.

Mr Love said The Royal Harbour Academy at Ramsgate was set to academise from 1 April. It had been a foundation school and associate member of The Coastal Academies Trust. Thanks were given to officers for their work on this and Mr Love wished the school success with its new governance arrangements.

4) Mr Brazier said that following the announcement made by the Chancellor in the recent budget, KCC had been allocated a share of £200 million for highways repairs. The £6 million received was to be used to accelerate the repairs that were being carried out on winter damage to Kent highways.

The Buses in Kent Working Group had its first meeting under the Chairmanship of Mr Chard and Mr Brazier was in attendance as an observer. A range of topics had been decided which would be discussed by the group over the forthcoming weeks.

Mr Brazier said he had taken a Semi-Urgent decision that enabled the Council to receive £19 million first instalment of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) from the Department for Transport. It was noted that at an 'All Member Briefing', officers had outlined how the first tranche of the BSIP funding would need to be spent. Following the expiry of contracts for supported buses, £425,000 was made available for community bus initiatives. It was noted that the usual amount was £100,000. 13 providers had been selected for awards from bids totalling £826,000 for the £425,000 available grant funding.

The Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Group continued to meet. It had received news that seven of the submitted schemes to Active Travel England (ATE) were to receive funds during tranche 4. Further details were to be made available in May 2023. Mr Brazier said he had met with Mr Danny Williams, Chief Executive Officer of ATE, and the Commissioner, Chris Boardman to discuss tranche 4 and why certain bids were unsuccessful. Mr Brazier noted that there had been a change in strategy towards the support of smaller-scale walking projects.

6) Miss Carey said that KCC had been shortlisted in LGC awards in the Digital Impact category for the Household Waste Recycling Centre booking system. Miss Carey was to be able to report the result in June 2023.

Miss Carey said that the regulations from The Environment Act 2021 were to lead to numerous changes, including the frequency of waste collection. The requirement to have a separate food waste collection was welcomed. A recent audit had found that a very high proportion of waste was food, with one district as high as 42% and half of which was in original packaging. A separate food waste collection was expected to reduce this and lessen the impact of contamination to allow for more recycling opportunities.

New duties were to be placed on the Council from The Environment Act concerning biodiversity and KCC's leadership role in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

7) Mr Murphy said that he had been contacted by the Welsh government. Mike Pollard, who had been involved in the Ireland-Wales Territorial Co-operation programme was keen to learn from the Council's work and experience with the Straits Committee and cross-border cooperation, both domestic and international. Meetings were ongoing sharing experiences and insights. Mr Murphy said his team were interested in the Holyhead-Dover freight route land bridge. It was also hoped that they would discuss small nuclear reactors.

Mr Murphy said he had met with Doug Bannister, CEO of the Port of Dover and they had discussed the need for more power, to increase the capacity to host cruise ships. The exit and entry system was also discussed, which had been delayed until early 2024 due to regulatory and technological issues. The Dover-Ireland-Holyhead freight route was discussed and plans for how traffic could flow more smoothly through the port.

Work was ongoing with officers regarding a potential waste facility involving Gravesham, Dartford and the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and talks were ongoing regarding funding.

Mr Murphy was to have a meeting with the Environment Agency about how to improve enforcement facilities, speed up prosecutions and create closer joint working across Kent.

8) Mr Hill said that Kent libraries had been successfully shortlisted for the National libraries Connected awards for 2 submissions:

Kent Playground had been shortlisted in the children and young people award category. This ground-breaking new programme had recently been recognised by the Arts Council as a national portfolio organisation and the powerful evaluation film of the progress to date was launched on 24th February 2023 at JVHome in Ashford which Mr Hill attended.

The work of the prison library team delivering new approaches to the service during the pandemic has also been shortlisted in the reading award.

Judging panels were being assembled from across the country which include leaders from across the sector. Results were to be announced later in the year.

The new County Register office, which was part of the Oakwood House development, had been completed and was open for business. Mr Hill had visited the site and he said the space was a stunning addition to the county register offices and a great venue to host couples' most special of days and citizenship ceremonies. The team had worked very hard moving over from Archbishop's Palace. Services to the public began on 1 March with the first notice of marriage appointments, the first register office wedding was booked on 31 March and the first large Kent Approved Premise ceremony is 6 April. The first citizenship ceremony took place on 13 March.

Active Kent and Medway had a new Chair – Graham Razey OBE – CEO of the East Kent Colleges Group. Mr Razey and the Partnership Director had been working on the development of the new countywide strategy for Sport and Physical Activity, 'Move Together' which was to launch in April. A number of key sporting organisations like Kent FA had pledged their support to its delivery and to encouraging Kent's residents to be more active, more often.

Lord Parkinson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Arts and Heritage and Department for Culture, Media and Sport Lords Minister visited the Sonia Boyce exhibition and the Children's Art Library at Turner Contemporary on 10 March. He was particularly interested in the cultural regeneration of Margate.

9) Mr Oakford said that in the new financial year, KCC needed to deliver what had been agreed in the budget. There had been reports that directorates had questioned how achievable the budget and associated savings were. He said that this was not acceptable. There were to be regular financial performance reviews and directorates working with Cabinet Members had to be prepared to develop in-year plans to mitigate any overspend. This was to require more accurate forecasting throughout the year and an understanding of the source of the financial pressures that KCC was facing. The only choice was to do, however painful, what was required to deliver the budget that was agreed.

Mr Oakford said that he wished to recognise the outstanding performance of the Property Team, having completed their target on the Asset Disposal Programme delivering capital receipts of over £12 million and the completion of the Oakwood House redevelopment within budget.

4. KCC Share of Retained Business Rates and Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2023-24 *(Item 5)*

Dave Shipton, Head of Financial Strategy, was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Oakford introduced and gave an overview of the report.
- 2) Mr Shipton gave further details. It was noted that the business rate retention calculation was complicated due to the revaluation of all the rateable values. The adjustment had not been fully completed yet and there could be further adjustments in 2024/25 and 2025/26. The revaluation was undertaken on a 3-year cycle. The final settlement was welcomed due to the extra funding from the

services grant, there was no guarantee that this funding would be available in future years. Some figures were still estimates but major adjustments were not anticipated.

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

5. Update on Supporting Kent Residents with Financial Hardship

(Item 6)

Lucy Alesbrook, Financial Hardship Programme Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1) Lucy Alesbrook introduced the update.

2) Further to comments and questions, it was noted:

- There were strict requirements about what support could be provided by the Household Support Fund but there was some flexibility to target where funding went. There needed to be a publicly available scheme that members of the public could put themselves forward for, rather than KCC identifying individuals for support.
- Since the announcement of the Household Support Fund, work had been undertaken and the eligibility criteria were being scoped out. The plan was to use a tranche version of the voucher scheme for a set amount of time to help manage demand and capacity. Residents were to be notified prior to the launch through press releases and the website.
- The Helping Hands monies and the Household Support Fund monies were non-recurring. The programme team had been clear and careful not to create an assumption that the funding would continue.

3) The Leader said that services such as those offering money advice were important. If work being done in this area demonstrated the impact of people avoiding crisis, that it had beneficial effect on their lives and the benefits were lasting, this would inform potential future schemes.

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

6. Financial Monitoring Report

(Item 7)

1) Mr Oakford outlined the report. There had been a reduction in the forecast overspend since the previously reported position. The overspend was still a cause for concern and work was ongoing to ensure that it was minimised. The Council's savings target for 2022/23 of £51.6 million had not been met, with £36.8 million forecast to be delivered by year-end. The savings targeted needed to be achieved in the next financial year as KCC could not keep bringing savings forward and rely on reserves. The High Needs deficit continued to be the Council's single biggest financial risk at £142 million by the end of the financial year. The Safety Valve Agreement with the Department for Education was expected to help in the medium term and put the budget on a sustainable footing. Difficult decisions were required to address the financial situation in the medium term.

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

- The forecast pressure for Adult Social Care was £25.6 million, a reduction of £2 million since quarter 2. The pressures were identified as £13.3 from the non-delivery of savings, and £12.2 million was moved back to 2023/24. There was also £2.3 million for the required increase in bad debt provision and £9.9 million of activity-related pressures. There was ongoing targeted action on the use of short-term beds, which contributed to a reduction in spending. It was noted that joint work across health and social care on hospital discharge was ongoing. Efforts were being made to use innovative technology and community care options to reduce the reliance on nursing and residential care. Work was ongoing to recover funds owed to the authority, in line with ethical best practice while supporting those in financial hardship.
- There was a long-term contract with the waste plant at Allington and the contract increased at an agreed rate linked to the Retail Price Index, causing a hit to the budget in April. The Waste Management Team had managed to absorb the cost pressure by improving recycling and recycling rates.
- The challenge that the High Needs Block deficit placed on the Council was acknowledged. There had been an uptick in the number of children identified as having SEND needs or requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and there had been some evidence that the criteria for SEND in the SEND code of practice had been loosely applied. The intention was to ensure that the criteria were applied appropriately and this would relieve the pressure on the budget.
- There had been a small increase in the number of Looked After Children, but the placement costs were high and a significant cost pressure. There was an issue with children with more complex needs as their placement costs were very high due to availability and staffing ratios. Work was ongoing to work in partnership with health colleagues to alleviate some of the pressures and recruit in-house foster carers. It was also noted the high costs of legal services.
- There were two areas of overspend identified as the delay in savings from the Supported Bus Services decision and the Kent Travel Saver as further capacity payments had to be made to providers after a delay of receiving payments from parents meant that the income would not be reported in the current year's accounts. Highway costs had been impacted by the rise in the rate of inflation and the cost incurred from the impact of Storm Eunice.

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

7. Quarterly Performance Report

(Item 8)

Rachel Kennard, Chief Analyst; Ben Watts, General Counsel and Richard Smith, Corporate Director for Adult Social Care were in attendance for this item.

1) Ms Kennard outlined the report for Quarter 3 (Q3), 2022-2023 and said that out of 37 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) contained within the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), 15 achieved target (rated green), 16 achieved and exceeded the floor standard but did not meet the target (rated amber), and 6 did not meet floor standard

(rated red). It was noted that the number of red ratings had fallen as the financial year progressed, but there had been a growth in amber ratings, largely at the expense of green. The direction of travel analysis continued to be less positive.

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

- The latest round of the Solar Together Scheme was open to households to use the collective buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage.
- KCC had statutory duties on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. There had been improvements and there were plans in place across the services to improve KCC's compliance. Improvements were necessary or the Council was at risk of being issued with an enforcement notice by the Information Commissioner.
- A new KPI was suggested for inclusion in future QPRs concerning response times to Highways and Transport enquiries.
- There had been targeted work on Care Needs Assessments. There had been improvements in the number of assessments and the number of annual reviews of individual care and support plans completed. Work was ongoing to meet the 28-day target.

3) RESOLVED to note the report.