

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 28 June 2023.

PRESENT: Mr N Baker (Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mrs R Binks, Mr C Broadley, Ms K Grehan, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr S C Manion, Mr J Meade, Mr A M Ridgers, Mr D Robey, Mr M J Sole, Mr R J Thomas, Mr D Watkins, Ms S Hamilton and Mr D Jeffrey

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy and Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

142. Membership

(Item 2)

Mr Baldock had joined the Cabinet Committee along with Ms Grehan and Mr Lewis who had replaced Ms Dawkins and Ms Meade.

RESOLVED that the change in membership be noted.

143. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 4)

There were no declarations of interest.

144. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2023

(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2023 were a correct record.

145. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 6)

1. Mr Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) The Council had been successful in securing £3.8million from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Traveller Site Fund to implement a range of improvements to the seven gypsy traveller sites owned and managed by Kent County Council.

- (b) Kent Libraries was shortlisted for two categories in the National Library awards, including Playground in the children's promise category, and the Prison Library team in the reading category. Mr Hill was pleased to announce that Ms Elizabeth Gunn and Ms Tracy McKechnie from the Prison Library Team won the reading award.
 - (c) The annual Summer Reading Challenge in Kent libraries would run from Saturday, 8 July until 9 September 2023 where children aged 4-11 would be able to visit Kent Libraries and get involved in "Ready, Set, Read!". Last year, over 16,000 Kent youngsters took part in the challenge and across the country, the Summer Reading Challenge reached over 700,000 children and families, with approximately 600,000 children taking part through their local library service.
 - (d) Turner Contemporary was currently exhibiting Beatriz Milhazes: Maresias, a survey of the work of Beatriz Milhazes, widely recognised as one of the leading abstract artists working today. This was her first UK solo institutional exhibition in over two decades and brought together 20 key paintings and 5 works on paper.
2. Mr Murphy, Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
- (a) The Employment Task Force was encouraging employers to look at skills and the improvement of recruitment and retention methods. The taskforce was being reviewed to ensure it was relevant to the objectives of the Council.
 - (b) The Straits Committee was meeting in Dover on 4 and 5 July 2023 and would focus on water conservation, effects of water erosion, preservation, and the quality of water.
 - (c) Local public opinion regarding potential small modular reactors at Dungeness was being explored and the Council was working closely with local authorities. A possible advantage of the reactors, if they were secured, was hydrogen production and desalination plants.
 - (d) A meeting took place on 26 June 2023 with further education college principles, chaired by the Leader of the Council. The committee looked at how courses could best provide the skillsets needed by industries in Kent, and a review of the committee was being undertaken.
 - (e) A South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Board meeting was taking place on 7 July 2023 to discuss the government announcement that funding for SELEP would cease in 2024.
3. Mr Murphy responded to the following questions and comments from Members:

- (a) A Member asked about progress at the Port of Ramsgate and Mr Murphy said tenders had been issued by Thanet District Council for the reopening of the port.
 - (b) Asked whether the Employment Taskforce extended to apprenticeships and skills, Mr Murphy said the Employment Taskforce would look at apprenticeships and their funding at greater depth.
 - (c) Asked whether, in addition to nuclear energy at Dungeness, other sources of renewable energy were being considered, Mr Murphy said as part of the Economic Development restructure there would be a post recruited to, to specifically look at energy infrastructure needs of the county and Ms Holt-Castle confirmed the new post would work closely with the Environment and Circular Economy Team.
 - (d) Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different energy sources and the importance of a water strategy in terms of accessing and utilising different types of water and consideration of the strategies used by building companies and developers. Mr Jones said the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee was looking at a water strategy and Southern Water attended the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee on a regular basis. Mr Jones said the Growth and Infrastructure Framework was a useful tool in identifying gaps in infrastructure and requirements for improvement. A Member highlighted the importance of prioritising the reduction of demand for energy such as electricity.
4. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following:
- (a) At the National Empty Homes Conference in Birmingham in May, No Use Empty (NUE) Officer, Mr Jake Body, received the Rising Star Award for his work.
 - (b) The Business Investment Team had received confirmation from government that funding to provide Kent and Medway Business Fund loans would be retained for ten years.
 - (c) The Growth and Communities team had recently completed the EU funded C-Care – Covid Channel Area Response Exchange project where businesses had been supported in relation to technological resilience and green recovery. The project also provided support and accreditation to Trading Standards Checked member companies.
 - (d) The Taste of Kent Awards which took place on 15 June 2023 celebrated, across 28 categories, some of Kent's best food and drink producers and hospitality venues.
 - (e) Active Kent and Medway launched the Summer Moves campaign which promoted low cost and easy access to new sport or activity across the county over the summer. Free bus travel was promoted over a weekend in June allowing residents to travel to leisure facilities and activities in Kent.

- (f) The Primary PE Conference was held on 16 May 2023 where over 100 schools across the county were represented. Feedback had been positive, and the team continued to work with schools to inspire future generations to be more active.
- (g) Trading Standards had recently completed a successful doorstep crime campaign in the villages around Gravesend and the team was posting reels on their Instagram and Facebook accounts to give tips to residents on the latest scams.
- (h) A Regional Tobacco Co-ordinator had been recruited to the Trading Standards team for the Southeast region. Four Trading Standards trainees had completed Part 1 of their professional exams and four members of staff were undertaking apprenticeships, all of which provided additional resilience and capacity to the team.
- (i) Animal Health Officers would be at the Kent County Show in July to ensure legal welfare standards were met and disease was not brought into the county.
- (j) Community Wardens had been busy engaging with scam victims and supporting Adult Social Care colleagues with visits to hard-to-reach residents. The impact of the Positive Wellbeing activities undertaken by Community Wardens showed that participants felt 46% less isolated and 38% less lonely, and 59% said their situation had improved. As a result, the positive wellbeing model was being rolled out across the service.
- (k) The Prime Minister visited the Kent Scientific Services offices in Kings Hill regarding the targeting of young children by vape manufacturers. Mr Jones congratulated two apprentices within the team, Ms Kirsty Thompson, and Ms Bethany Collins, who had gained their degrees.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.

146. Review of the Kent Community Warden Service (Item 7)

Mr Shaffick Peerbux, Head of Community Safety, Community Protection and Ms Kathleen Dardry, Community Safety Practice Development Officer, were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Hill introduced the item and expressed his disappointment that, along with many other difficult decisions the Council had had to take to meet budgetary requirements, it had been found necessary to reduce the budget for Community Wardens. Mr Hill stressed that the proposed reshaping of the service was not a reflection on performance and highlighted the service would remain robust if the proposals were implemented. He said the proposed model was flexible to allow for additions in the future should resources become available.

2. Mr Peerbux introduced the report and provided a summary of the work involved, in the pre-consultation period, in identifying the proposals to redesign the service.
3. Mr Peerbux and Ms Holt-Castle responded to the following comments and questions from Members:
 - (a) Members commented on the possibility of obtaining, and actively promoting for, other means of funding to continue the current service provision, for example through commercial sponsorship, developer contributions and parish councils. Ms Holt-Castle said alternative sources of funding had been, and would continue to be, considered and conversations had taken place with colleagues in Adult Social Care regarding health and care partnerships. Ms Holt-Castle clarified that the proposed future model was scalable and would be able to absorb any future opportunities. Ms Holt-Castle explained that Section 106 developer contributions were restricted to capital and equipment and could not be used for staffing costs, however Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was more flexible.
 - (b) Members expressed their concern for the long-term effects on communities as a result of the reduction in the service, for example in relation to health, increased anti-social behaviour and vulnerable residents.
 - (c) Asked about the reduction in posts, Mr Peerbux said this amounted to approximately 32 posts and the streamlining of management. The redundancy costs were difficult to predict at this stage and unions had been consulted from the outset.
 - (d) Regarding equality implications, a Member commented that the four groups impacted by the service reduction would also be affected by reductions in other services and asked whether the accumulative effects had been considered. Mr Peerbux said the Geographical Allocation Policy would involve work to ensure adverse effects were not multiplied on specific groups.
 - (e) Members echoed the comments made by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services regarding the invaluable and important work carried out by Community Wardens.
 - (f) Asked whether proactive engagement with parish councils would take place, Mr Peerbux said engagement with the Kent Association of Local Councils took place as part of the pre-consultation period and work would continue closely with them.
 - (g) A Member referred to the reduction in funding for Police Community Support Officers in Kent Police and the further effects of this on communities. Mr Hill said he was liaising with the Chief Constable and the Commissioner regarding the gap this would leave.

- (h) Mr Peerbux clarified that the Positive Wellbeing pilot to address social isolation was being embedded and would be part of the community warden function moving forwards along with other KCC commissioned services.
- (i) Members discussed the need for local Community Wardens with knowledge of the local area and commented on the opportunity of shared and partnership working with district, borough, and parish councils.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee considered and commented on the public consultation proposals alongside an updated geographical allocation policy, to help identify where wardens will be placed.

147. Performance Dashboard

(Item 8)

Mr Matthew Wagner, Interim Chief Analyst, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Wagner introduced the performance report for Quarter 4 of 2022/23 and clarified that figures provided for the year to date referred to the complete financial year. He said of the 25 Key Performance Indicators, 22 were rag rated green, 2 were amber and 1 was red.
2. Mr Murphy, Ms Holt-Castle, and Ms Taylor Smith responded to the following questions and comments from Members:
 - (a) Asked about Section 106 developer contributions received from district planning authorities, Mr Murphy said formulas, set by central government, were applied to Section 106 funding requests, based on the relevant development and the Developer Contributions Guide. With regards to CIL, a bid could be made for funding and negotiated with the districts. The red KPI related to two districts where CIL money was being negotiated and was delayed.
 - (b) Asked about information relating to libraries, Ms Taylor-Smith said feedback was collected and online surveys were carried out. Ms Taylor-Smith said she would investigate feedback received from Members in relation to individual libraries.
 - (c) Asked how the percentage of children with Free School Meals who engaged with the Kent School Games was determined, Ms Holt-Castle clarified that this KPI included those who had participated in local finals, district finals and county finals.
 - (d) A Member asked whether comparative data from the previous five years in relation to the percentage of death and birth registrations could be presented at a future date.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note the performance report for Quarter 4 of 2022/23.

148. Underage Vaping

(Item 9)

Mr James Whiddett, Operations Manager for Trading Standards, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Hill introduced the item and highlighted the good work of Kent Trading Standards and Kent Scientific Services within this area and referred to the Prime Minister's visit in May. He stressed the importance of the issue, and the adverse effects vaping had on young people.
2. Mr Whiddett introduced the report and provided some background information. He said in 2021 the service had received 32 vaping enquiries, compared to 99 in 2022 and 90, to date, in 2023.
3. Mr Whiddett responded to the following questions and comments from Members:
 - (a) Asked about information for schools, Mr Whiddett said the work being undertaken with Public Health would include good practice guides for schools and there was guidance available from the Association of Directors of Public Health. Currently work was directed at secondary schools, but recent developments had indicated that this should be extended to primary schools.
 - (b) A member asked how vaping affected smoking rates and Mr Whiddett said NHS data, recently provided on smoking and vaping prevalence, was being reviewed.
 - (c) Members asked about the disposal of vapes and associated costs, particularly those containing lithium. Mr Whiddett said work was underway with the Environment Agency and the Council's steps in disposing of batteries and nicotine in products was in accordance with the guidance and best practice. Mr Jones said work was ongoing with the Kent Resource Partnership in looking at the risks involved for collection and disposal of contaminated vapes and it was suggested this be discussed further at the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee.
 - (d) Asked about the financial impacts of tackling the issue on the Council, Mr Whiddett said work with agencies to identify the criminals and claim back costs was a complex situation and ongoing.
 - (e) Asked about the Council's involvement in online sales, Mr Whiddett said the focus was currently on the High Street where data indicated more significant activity, but online sales would also be considered when information became available.
 - (f) Asked about addressing demand, Mr Whiddett said meetings took place with public health regarding the use of illegal products amongst young people and underage vaping had recently been included.
 - (g) Members noted that a government consultation had finished on 6 June 2023 which looked at issues such as design, disposal, and the selling of

vapes to children. It was suggested that, following the government report, these issues be addressed across the portfolios.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note the report.

149. Work Programme 2023/24
(Item 10)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee note the Work Programme 2023/24.