

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 11 October 2022

PRESENT: Mr R J Thomas (Chair), Mr N Baker (Substitute for Mr P V Barrington-King), Mr P Bartlett, Mr T Bond, Mr A Brady, Mr T Cannon, Mr N J D Chard, Mr M Dendor, Mr A J Hook, Mr D Jeffrey (Substitute for Mr G Cooke), Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr J P McInroy, Mr P Stepto and Dr L Sullivan

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Deputy Chief Executive), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Ms A Agyepong (Assistant Director (Countywide) Adult Social Care and Health), Ms S Annan-Veitch (Policy Advisor), Mr A Carty, Mr S Dodd (Investment and Development Consultant), Ms K Frearson (Head of Property Strategy, Infrastructure), Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning Analytics), Ms C Maynard (Head of Commissioning Portfolio - Outcome 2 and 3), Mr J Sanderson (Head of Property Operations), Ms J Taylor (Head of Capital Works), Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Hayley Savage (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

101. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

1. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr P Barrington-King and Mr G Cooke.
2. Mr N Baker was present as a substitute for Mr Barrington-King and Mr D Jeffrey for Mr Cooke.

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

(Item 3)

In relation to agenda item 5, Dr L Sullivan declared that her husband served as the Chair of Gravesham Borough Council's Community Safety Panel and held the Cabinet Portfolio which included Crime and Disorder.

103. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022

(Item 4)

1. It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chairman. There were two matters arising:-

- a) in minute 88, Mr Love reminded the committee that the list of meeting dates announced at the July meeting had since changed to accommodate the period of national mourning and a subsequent adjustment to the autumn meeting cycle. The updated meeting dates are as follows:
Wednesday, 23 November 2022, 2pm
Wednesday, 18 January 2023, 10am
Thursday, 9 March 2023, 10am
Thursday, 11 May 2023, 10am
Tuesday, 4 July 2023, 2 pm

- b) in minute 89, paragraph 1.b), Mr Brady reminded the committee that the inclusion in reports of full details of procurement costs of any project had been requested and promised but was not yet happening. Mr Watts advised that the Corporate Management Team had been told that this should be done for future reports and he undertook that this inclusion would indeed be made in reports to the committee's November meeting. He said he would ask the clerk to forward to him any report which included a procurement element and that, if he was not satisfied that sufficient cost detail had been presented, he would not allow the report to go forward for publication in the agenda pack.

104. Domestic Abuse – The Kent Picture

(Item 5)

Dr L Sullivan declared that her husband served as the Chair of Gravesham Borough Council's Community Safety Panel and held the Cabinet Portfolio which included Crime and Disorder.

1. Mr D Whittle, Ms S Annan-Veitch, Mrs A Beer and Ms A Agyepong responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) asked if female staff would be surveyed to see if they felt safe working for the County Council, and if they would be happy for their daughters to work for the Council, Mrs Beer advised that the 2022 staff survey, just launched, included a question about feeling safe at work, so data from this would become available later;

 - b) asked about the provision and spending of Government funding, and why there was an underspend in the last financial year, Mr Whittle advised that the 2021/22 funding had been provided to councils 'in year' and that the establishment of new arrangements, including resourcing and staffing, took time and hence had led to an underspend. He also advised that all south-east authorities had been in a similar situation and, as a result, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had agreed that funds could be rolled forward to the next financial year;

 - c) asked why money used to address governance and administrative issues, for example, increasing data capture, was not spent instead on frontline services, Mr Whittle advised that the duties under the Act and the grant provided by Government didn't only relate to the provision of safe accommodation but was to support the new statutory multi-agency

Domestic Abuse Partnership and the needs assessment on which the Domestic Abuse Strategy and commissioning activity was based. As such, these were legitimate costs necessary to meet the statutory obligations;

- d) asked for a breakdown of this spending, beyond the information included in the appendix to the report, Mr Whittle undertook to provide more detailed information after the meeting. He also suggested that the committee have a regular update report on work to address domestic abuse, perhaps six-monthly or annually;
- e) Ms Annan-Veitch advised that the service was very proud of having recently received accreditation by the White Ribbon Campaign. Domestic abuse was a very difficult and complex subject to address and this was an indication that what the Council was doing was effective. In addition, the Lived Experience Engagement Programme (LEEP) was a good example of partnership working and engagement, to help the Council understand the experiences of those who have lived through domestic abuse. Ms Agyepong, Chair of the Partnership Board, commented on the good work going on in local authorities to address issues around domestic abuse and said the Act had brought a good opportunity to address to work together to address needs;
- f) a view was expressed that more provision was needed for children to be accommodated at refuges, as many parents would not leave an abusive relationship if they could not take their children with them. This should be the highest priority. Ms Annan-Veitch advised that the Children's Commissioner had also identified this issue as a priority to be addressed; and
- g) another speaker added that refuges for men were also needed, as 26% of cases of domestic abuse were against men. Only 1 in 20 male victims were known to seek help. All victims of domestic abuse should have equal access to shelter and support.

2. The Chair acknowledged the good work going on to address issues around domestic abuse and agreed that the Council should continue to pursue funding to support his work.

3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and that regular update reports be submitted to the committee, at a frequency to be agreed.

105. Performance Dashboard for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department

(Item 6)

1. Ms Kennard introduced the report and advised that, since publishing the report, data had become available for HR25, with the rating achieved being green. Mr Watts and Mrs Beer then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) in response to questions about KPI CS07 – percentage of complaints responded to in timescale - Mrs Beer advised that, whilst no change was planned to the complaints policy, work was ongoing to ensure the complaints process was efficient, and data was regularly monitored and reviewed to take steps to lower the number of complaints needing to be dealt with;
- b) asked about the themes of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and why people asked what they did, Mr Watts advised that he would be able to report more detail for the committee on FOI requests in the near future as new work in this area had recently been started with the appointment of a team of graduates, tasked to research this area. He advised that both FOI and data subject requests were subject to a corporate key performance indicator but that data subject requests were not part of the FOI legislation but were covered by the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Subject data subject requests tended to increase after showings of television programmes in which people traced lost family members. They took time to respond to, as a social worker may have to review the content of personal files, for example, in relation to a vulnerable person, before they could be provided to the questioner. The Government may decide to review or repeal GDPR legislation in the near future and the outcome of this would have an impact of this area of the Council's work;
- c) in response to queries about the reasons for the percentage of daytime telephone calls answered being lower than target, Mrs Beer confirmed that retention and recruitment of staff was a national problem for call centres in the current buoyant recruitment market. She confirmed that the Council continued to work closely with Agilisys, who provided the call centre service, on a range of measures, to address these issues. It was important to ensure that residents could find the information they needed or make contact with the County Council in a number of ways, including online. This would help manage the volume of calls to Contact Point. In response to a comment about the search engine on kent.gov, Mrs Beer confirmed that a review of the website was part of the Resident and User Experience Programme;
- d) the Chair commented that, previously, a Member IT group had existed to discuss and comment on issues such as the website development. Mr Watts added that such groups could be re-established if required but would need to be resourced
- e) asked how many people submitting FOIs were seeking Judicial Review, Mr Watts advised that a very small percentage sought referral to the Information Commissioner's Office or a Judicial Review. He commented that the FOI legislation was over 20 years old and had come into force at a time when personal internet access and local authority websites did not exist as they did now to help people find basic information for themselves, and that, subsequently, the nature of information now requested via FOI was more complex. People also sought data in different forms from that in which it was usually recorded. He undertook to include more statistics and detail in report to a later meeting; and

- f) asked how the performance of the Chief Executive's and Deputy Chief Executive's Directorate compared to that of other Directorates, Mrs Beer undertook to respond to the questioner outside the meeting.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks, and that a more detailed report on Freedom of Interest requests be made to a future meeting.

106. Council Tax Update

(Item 7)

1. Mr Shipton introduced the report and advised that any change to Council Tax would need to be agreed by District Councils in partnership with the County Council. He then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) asked about the process, and what role Members were expected to take in it, Mr Shipton advised that part of the aim of the report was to get a steer from Members about the approach they wanted to be taken and what input they wanted to have, as District Councils across the county had different processes and Council Tax Reduction schemes;
 - b) asked why there was such disparity, and what support councils would offer families who were struggling to pay, Mr Shipton advised that all District Councils have introduced hardship schemes following the 2017 scheme review, and that the County Council would contribute to these schemes. These arrangements were now being reviewed. There would inevitably be some disparity between issues experienced in different areas of the county, due to different types of accommodation and tenure, for example, higher or lower levels of tenancy and owner-occupancy in any one area;
 - c) Ms Cooke advised that the first stage of the process would be to carry out a review, taking account of Members' wishes and liaising with District Council colleagues, and then report back to the committee and Cabinet Member before moving to the next stage, as the subject area was very complex. This report was to give Members advance notice of this process, which was welcomed;
 - d) Mr Watts advised that any material change to be made to the Council Tax process would need to be the subject of a key decision as part of the County Council's decision-making process; and
 - e) concern was expressed that the Council should be seen to be genuinely consultative and not dictatorial.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions, in particular:
 - a) approaches to increasing future years' tax base;
 - b) the approach to monitoring Council Tax collection and factors affecting future tax base;
 - c) a review of Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes:

- d) a review the support/incentive payments the County Council provides to District Councils:
- e) the County Council's response to the proposed changes to Council Tax under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill: and
- f) the risk to Council Tax from economic recession.

be noted, with thanks.

107. 22/00027 - Disposal of Saxon House, Tina Gardens, Broadstairs, CT10 1BJ
(Item 8)

1. The Cabinet Member, Mr P Oakford, introduced the report and reminded the committee of the Council's responsibility, when disposing of premises which were surplus to requirements, to achieve best value for public money. He then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked for assurance that the open green space at the site would be protected, Mr Oakford advised that the future use of the site, once disposed of by the County Council, would be a decision for Thanet District Council as planning authority; and
- b) asked if, by disposing of the site, the County Council was going against its own strategic statement to protect its green open spaces as an asset, Mr Oakford reminded the committee that the Council's duty was to secure the best price for any site which had been declared surplus to service requirements under its disposals policy, and hence secure best value for public money.

2. It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree to the disposal of the site and delegate authority to:

- a) the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the terms of the disposal; and
- b) the Director of Infrastructure, to authorise the execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above,

be endorsed.

108. Facilities Management Update
(Item 9)

1. Mrs R Spore and Mr J Sanderson responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked about the need for more detail of procurement costs, as covered in the minutes of the July meeting and discussed earlier in the meeting, Mrs Spore confirmed that these costs were included in previous reports presented at this committee;

- b) plans for user and stakeholder satisfaction surveys were welcomed but concern was expressed that, when surveys had been undertaken in the past, levels of satisfaction with performance had generally been low. An example of Northfleet Youth Centre was given and Mr Sanderson advised that some remedial works had been completed at the centre at no cost to the KCC. Longer-term replacement works were required but were not currently in the planned programme of works. Given the budget constraints, the strategy adopted was keeping premises 'warm, safe and dry' (WSD) rather than modernisation;
 - c) Mr Sanderson advised that he wanted to be advised by the committee about what future information Members wanted to see reported;
 - d) asked about the failure so far to identify a suitable contractor for security, reception and other services, and how confident the KCC was of finding a suitable contractor. Mrs Spore advised that the KCC was liaising with the current provider about continuing for a further fixed-term contract of up to two years; and
 - e) asked why reception services were contracted out rather than provided in-house, Mrs Spore advised that this was an option for future provision but that, in the short term, a new contract needed to start on 1 November 2022.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

109. Corporate Estate - 10 year planned maintenance predicted spend
(Item 10)

1. Mr Oakford, Mrs Spore and Mr Watts responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
- a) asked about plans for the future of the Strategic Headquarters (SHQ), Mr Oakford reminded the committee that several progress reports on the future of SHQ had been submitted to the committee over time and that a key decision report would be brought to the November meeting;
 - b) asked about whose decision it would be to either maintain or close a building, Mr Oakford advised that a decision had been made ten years ago that savings property assets would need to be made to support front line service delivery, and these savings were now becoming apparent in the form of proposals to close and dispose of premises which were surplus to service requirements and discussions about maintenance, for example, of the SHQ buildings. Focus was now more on maintaining and improving premises which the Council intended to retain in the longer-term. Part of this picture would be changes to work practices which had arisen in recent years and been exacerbated by lockdowns during the pandemic;
 - c) Mr Oakford confirmed that had weekly meetings with Mrs Spore to monitor maintenance and monthly meetings with Property and Education teams about the County Council's estate. He advised that it was for the Chair to

decide how often reports on the condition and maintenance of the County Council estate should be made to the committee. The Chair suggested that it would be sensible to look at maintenance as part of the main budget setting in the new year;

- d) Mr Watts added that any part of a premises proposed for sale would need to be the subject of a specific key decision, before marketing could begin, and part of this decision paperwork would be to include the vision for the future. Mr Oakford advised that work to SHQ which was the subject of a key decision in 2021 was currently starting but no key decision on the future use of SHQ had yet been taken;
 - e) asked about the 'warm, safe, dry' (WSD) policy, Mr Oakford reminded that previous reports on maintenance issues of SHQ showed that that work had exceeded the WSD policy. Mrs Spore offered to bring a report to the committee to set out and help Members understand the WSD policy. Ongoing surveys would ensure that robust data would be available but funding available covered the bare minimum and made planning a future programme very difficult. She reassured Members that no County Council building would continue to be used if it was deemed unsafe under Health and Safety legislation; and
 - f) asked what information about a local premises proposed for disposal would be made available to a local Member, and when, Mr Oakford advise that the Local Member/s for a site would always be engaged as part of the Council's formal decision-making process. It was not known yet which buildings might yet be considered for disposal in the future as an ongoing review was currently in progress.
2. It was RESOLVED that the progress and the current cost data, based on surveys completed, be noted, with thanks.

110. Work Programme 2022/23

(Item 11)

It was RESOLVED that the committee's planned work programme for 2022/23 be noted.