

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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 Tuesday, 26 September 2023.

PRESENT: Mr H Rayner (Vice-Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mrs R Binks, Mr D L Brazier, Mr C Broadley, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms K Grehan, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr J Meade, Mr A M Ridgers, Mr R J Thomas and Mr A Sandhu, MBE

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy, Mrs C Bell and Sir Paul Carter, CBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Smith (Economic Advisor), Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

150. Membership

(Item 2)

Mr Brazier and Mr Crow-Brown had joined the committee and replaced Mr Baker, Mr Robey, and Mr Watkins. Since the agenda was published a Conservative vacancy had arisen and been filled by Mr Sandhu.

RESOLVED that the change in membership be noted.

151. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies were received from Mr Cannon and Mr Sole.

152. Election of Chair

(Item 4)

1. Mr Brazier proposed, and Mr Meade seconded that Mr Sandhu be elected Chair of the Cabinet Committee.
2. Mr Baldock proposed, and Ms Grehan seconded that Mr Lewis be elected Chair of the Cabinet Committee.
3. Members voted on the election of Chair, and it was agreed by majority vote that Mr Sandhu be elected Chair of the Cabinet Committee.
4. The Vice-Chair, Mr Rayner, announced that he would be standing down as Vice-Chair and Member of the Cabinet Committee with immediate effect.

RESOLVED that Mr Sandhu be elected Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

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

(Item 5)

Mr Meade declared an interest under Item 11 - 23/00089 - *Transition of Local Enterprise Partnership Responsibilities to Kent County Council* - in that he was a member of the Local Government Association People and Places Board which was undertaking work in this area.

154. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023

(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 were a correct record.

155. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 7)

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Herne Bay Library would reopen to the public on Wednesday 4th October following essential maintenance works including internal and external improvements.
 - (b) The Library Summer reading Challenge 'Ready, Set, Read!' took place over the summer and libraries hosted a range of activities and events to support the challenge. Over 19,000 children take part in person in a library, an increase of 9% on last year, with just under 2,000 joining online. In total 20,106 children took part in Ready, Set, Read!
 - (c) The Council's social prescribing service, Positive Wellbeing, developed by the EU funded Connected Communities project ended in April and was now provided by all senior Community Wardens across Kent. The pilot was a great success with a significant overall reduction in social isolation and loneliness amongst service users. The next step was to complete an analysis of who in Kent needed the greatest support and identify potential delivery partners for the Positive Wellbeing service. Monitoring and evaluation across the service would take place to ensure results were measured and reported.
 - (d) The Community Warden consultation would close on 3 October 2023 and the Council was keen to ensure everyone had a chance to have their say, particularly those from vulnerable groups or individuals with protected characteristics. Mrs Bell urged Members to promote the consultation to their residents.
2. Members asked about the Community Wardens Consultation and how the potential drop in numbers of wardens would affect the delivery of the Positive Wellbeing Service, and Mrs Bell said social prescribing would continue to be

offered through Adult Social Care to promote support in the community and work was ongoing with the NHS to develop social prescribing and community navigation.

3. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) A number of visits had taken place including with the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment at Medway Council, the Leader of Folkestone & Hythe District Council regarding Otterpool and small modular reactors in Dungeness, and the Cabinet member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy at Folkestone & Hythe District Council regarding levelling up funds. More visits with counterparts within the districts were planned.
 - (b) On 26 July 2023 Mr Murphy attended the naming of a hybrid and double-ended P&O Pioneer Ferry at Dover Docks. The ferry was expected to reduce carbon emissions by 40% and had been designed for the Dover to Calais route.
 - (c) Along with the Leader Mr Murphy visited the Berkley Group factory in Gravesend in August which employed 90 people for the automated building of modular homes. At full production 1,000 home units per annum could be produced and work was also taking place regarding apprenticeships.
 - (d) Since December 2021, the Straits Committee member authorities had collectively committed over £200,000 to nine cross-Channel projects, allowing schools, universities, business, voluntary and public sector partners from Kent and the near continent to work together on themes that include education, social care, climate change, culture, heritage, and sport. Mr Murphy attended a commemoration to mark the 70th anniversary of the tragic 1953 North Sea flood which included a conference for water experts to exchange good practices on addressing climate challenges.
4. Mr Murphy responded to the following questions and comments from Members:
 - (a) Members discussed Manston Airport and requested that an update be presented to the Cabinet Committee at a future meeting.
 - (b) Members discussed the future consideration of apprenticeships at cabinet committees with reference to specific sectors. Mr Murphy said apprenticeships were discussed at the Employment Task Force and Mr David Smith confirmed that statistics were considered periodically by the Employment Task Force and the county was currently tracking the national average but within Kent the performance differed within districts.
5. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following:

- (a) The Libraries, Registration and Archive (LRA) Service was hosting its annual Customer Service Excellence inspection, the results of which would be provided in due course.
 - (b) The Community Warden Service was busy over the summer addressing anti-social behaviour in communities and undertaking a number of referrals to support vulnerable people. On 11th September the team delivered a community safety information session covering the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Consultation.
 - (c) The coroners and the staff supporting them had now moved into their new space at Oakwood House. Final works were underway to open the court rooms, collocating the courts with the service for the first time.
 - (d) The Economic Development team had been working on LEP transition and were preparing for the reopening of the Kent & Medway Business Fund. The team had been collating applications for a final round of 'Getting Building Fund' administered by SELEP. The Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) had been working to rank the projects and submit a prioritised list of bids for later consideration by SELEP.
 - (e) Mr Jones had visited two sites in Dover transformed by loans from KCC's No Use Empty Scheme including the Tridax Business Park in Whitfield which had created a number of new commercial units and the Railway Bell site near River which had seen a derelict pub converted into 6 apartments with 6 high quality houses on the grounds.
 - (f) The Community Protection communications team continued to support the cost-of-living crisis and those it affected the most using alerts and social media messaging. Ongoing messaging and awareness raising of doorstep crime continued and the team was warning about high levels of illegal and unsafe e-cigarettes and vapes.
 - (g) The Trading Standards ports team continued to tackle the issue of illegal vapes imported through Kent ports.
 - (h) Kent Scientific Services had secured a further £100,000 grant from the Food Standards Agency as part of their drive to support the capacity and capability of Official Control Laboratories post EU Exit. Following the visit by the Prime Minister, the BBC had filmed a programme linked to the presence of allergens in vegan food.
 - (i) The film, The Wonderful World of Henry Sugar, filmed in Kent was being released on Netflix on 27 September and contributed £2.5million to the Kent economy.
6. A Member commented on potential opportunities available to the Council by promoting the films that were filmed in Kent.

RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

156. Petition Scheme Debate - Folkestone Library

(Item 8)

Mr Bryan Rylands (Petitioner), Mr James Pearson, Head of Libraries, Registration and Archives, and Mr James Sanderson, Head of Property Operations, were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Rylands, the lead Petitioner, presented the petition which requested that Folkestone Library, Grace Hill be repaired and re-opened to the public, and highlighted some key points. He explained the history and location of the library and expressed the disappointment of the local people caused by the closure. Mr Rylands said he understood the financial challenges the Council currently faced and said the campaign called for three things to happen: repair, retain and reopen. He said the facts had been examined in detail and with care, and a way forward could be found by working with local partners. Mr Rylands said the expectations of the campaign were not impossible and he felt no stone should be left unturned. He asked the Cabinet Committee for their support in moving forward the repair and reopening of the library.
2. The Chair expressed the views of Local Member, Mr Jeffrey, who had not been able to attend the meeting. He said Mr Jeffrey supported the petition for KCC to repair and reopen the library at some point in the future, if feasible, and welcomed the temporary library services in Folkestone town centre.
3. The Chair invited Members to discuss the petition and the following comments in support of the petition were made:
 - (a) Concern was expressed that temporary solutions may become permanent if an approach to repair the library was not progressed.
 - (b) The Council had a duty to maintain its listed buildings.
 - (c) Libraries unite young and old people, were an asset within communities and should not be undervalued.
 - (d) Members discussed the possibility of a phased approach in repairing the library due to budget constraints.
 - (e) Members supported collaboration with partners, groups, and local authorities to explore potential funding solutions.
4. The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, Mrs Bell, thanked Mr Rylands for submitting the petition and said she understood and welcomed the views that were expressed. She said any solution would have to be collaborative with external organisations and she would take on board the points made during the debate to try and find a solution. Mrs Bell said potential funding costs to repair Folkestone Library could be explored by Infrastructure colleagues and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, and be reported back to the committee.
5. Mr Meade proposed, and Mr Ridgers seconded the recommendation set out in the report with the addition that a report be brought to a future meeting of the committee, and it was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee debated the issues raised in the petition, commented to the Cabinet

Member for Community and Regulatory Services, and a report be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

157. Kent & Medway Business Fund Bi-Annual Monitoring - Q4 2022/23

(Item 9)

Mr Martyn Riley, Project Manager, and Ms Susan Berdo, Strategic Programme Manager, were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Riley introduced the report which summarised the results of KCC's monitoring returns from businesses that had received loans and equity from KCC managed Government funded Business Investment Schemes, including the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) scheme and the former Regional Growth Fund (RGF) schemes, up until the end of Q4 2022/23.
2. Members asked about bad debts and costs, and whether any money would be owed back to the government should the scheme be ceased, Mr Riley said the Council did not have responsibility for bad debts under the scheme and the funding was ring fenced for the specific purpose of the fund, but there would be a contractual responsibility to recover the funds. Sir Paul Carter confirmed debt right off had been minimal and that administration costs had risen slightly recently due to the awaited confirmation from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities that the Council could continue to provide loans to business, which had now been received. Ms Berdo said a variety of costs were incurred in administering the funds, but financial modelling was carried out to ensure a 10% administration fee was the correct amount.

RESOLVED that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee notes the report.

158. 23/00088 - Kent & Medway Business Fund 2023

(Item 10)

Ms Susan Berdo, Strategic Programme Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Berdo introduced the report which proposes that the Council reopen the Kent & Medway Business Fund (KMBF) on 9 October 2023, to offer loans to businesses within Kent & Medway, following formal written approval from the Head of Regional Growth Fund (RGF), Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities received on 12 June 2023. This would allow the Council to continue managing the recycled KMBF/RGF investments to provide loans to local businesses until March 2032. Ms Berdo explained that since the report was published legal advice had been sought to ensure the funds were compliant with the UK Subsidy Control Act. She said funding was available under two schemes, the Kent and Medway Business Fund and the KMBF Small Business Boost.
2. Sir Paul Carter said the fund would also focus on marketing for, and attracting, businesses where the growth curve was good, and they wanted to get to the next level.

RESOLVED that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee endorse the proposed decision to:

- (i) Reopen the Kent & Medway Business Fund (KMBF) in October 2023 and continue to provide loan finance to businesses until March 2032;
- (ii) Approve the KMBF Scheme Governance and decision-making arrangements; and
- (iii) Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take relevant actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement this decision.

159. 23/00089 - Transition of Local Enterprise Partnership Responsibilities to Kent County Council

(Item 11)

Mr Steve Samson, Interim Head of Economy, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and explained that the government was withdrawing support from SELEP from April 2024 and responsibilities for functions delivered by SELEP, on behalf of Kent and Medway, would be transferred to the Council.
2. Mr Samson introduced the report and explained the Council's three prime functions, as a result of the LEP transition, included economic strategy, ensuring business representation and delivering certain government programmes. In addition to those core functions there would be a range of additional activities including the provision of business support services through the Kent & Medway Growth Hub service. He said the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership already had a lot of activity and processes in place to take on those functions and funding in the region of £5-10million would be available as a new capital programme scheme from repaid Growing Places Fund loans. Mr Samson explained that a draft Kent & Medway Integration plan was being worked on with support from KCC's Legal, Human Resources and Finance teams, to take into account the potential implications on KCC services.
3. A Member asked about the administration fees for any future funds managed by KCC and any funding to support the potential transfer of any SELEP staff to KCC on a fixed term basis and how this would be covered long term. Mr Samson said discussions were taking place through the County Council Network regarding the importance of government providing sufficient funding to support new activities and he was optimistic there would be funding beyond 2025. Funding would be provided by SELEP for any staff wishing to transfer to KCC as part of a specific recruitment process and an amount of government funding would be provided to KCC to cover new burdens.

RESOLVED that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee endorse the proposed decision to agree to:

- a) the transfer of relevant South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) responsibilities to Kent County Council from April 2024 including:
 - Business representation
 - Strategic economic planning

- The delivery of government programmes (where directed); and

b) to delegate authority to the Director for Growth and Communities to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

160. Performance Dashboard

(Item 12)

Mr Matthew Wagner, Chief Analyst (interim), was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Wagner introduced the performance report for Quarter 1 of 2023/24 and said one new KPI on the percentage of service users who report feeling safer due to warden support had been added and four had been removed from the Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) section which had been RAG rated green in the previous report. He said of the 22 Key Performance Indicators, 16 were rag rated green, 4 were amber and 2 were red.

RESOLVED that The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee notes the performance report for Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

161. Work Programme 2023/24

(Item 13)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme 2023/24.