

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 7 March 2024.

PRESENT: Mr S Holden (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr T Bond, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr M Dendor, Mr A R Hills, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr H Rayner, Mr D Robey, Mr A Sandhu, MBE and Mr M Whiting

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Baldock (virtually)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Cannon, Ms Dawkins and Mr Chittenden for whom Mr Passmore was present.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2024 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

4. Verbal Updates from Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

1) Mr Baker said, despite the continuing unsettled weather creating high demand on the service, continued progress was being made by officers to keep the highways safe. This included KCC's highways team being on course to complete its £37.5 million planned road and pavement maintenance programme for 2023/24. By the end of March, 1,250,000m² of Kent's roads will have been resurfaced and 90,000m² of its pavements during 2023/24. This programme was preventing potholes and other surface defects appearing in the first place, keeping the highways safe.

The Pothole Blitz programme had commenced and was to run through the year into the autumn, making best use of the fine weather. £8 million of additional Department for Transport (DfT) grant funding was to be put to good use to repair Kent's roads. Work was to start on a major project to reconstruct a section of the A299 Thanet Way at Whitstable to permanently resolve undulations that regularly occur. These works were funded by £4 million of the DfT's Challenge Fund which KCC successfully bid

for, together with an allocation of about £420,000 from KCC's own road maintenance budget. It was expected that works would be completed by 20 July. Once this essential maintenance was completed, Mr Baker was confident there would be a noticeable difference in the quality of the surface, which would be welcomed by all road users.

The safety of road users was an important priority and in the Members' newsletter were details of recent schemes including Wrotham Road, A225, Shoreham Road, Oakfield Lane, Beaver Lane, Margate Road in Herne Bay, A2990 Old Thanet Way and at Lower Halstow.

Officers and members of the Active Travel working group (cross party) met in Hythe on 27 February to look at some of the local issues and opportunities for Active Travel. There was an excellent presentation by Sustrans. It was hoped that these sessions could be repeated in other areas of Kent.

The Bikeability team had secured additional funding to support and enhance KCC's offer in this area. Cycle training was offered to almost 9,000 children each year. There was good news when the Secretary of State for Transport announced, in a parliamentary debate, that he had approved funding for recommended schemes put forward by Kent County Council to Active Travel England. Whilst no specific schemes were named, KCC's bid for £1.2m for funding of the Aylesford Towpath was looking favourable. Any announcement in this regard was subject to a media embargo.

The Public Transport and Fastrack Team had awarded a new bus electrification infrastructure contract to VEV. The contract covers the electric fleets for both Kent Thameside and Dover. The mobilisation of the project was underway and the three sites for the chargers were to be at Dartford Acacia Hall, Gravesend Bus Hub, and Dover Priory Station respectively and were to all be live by March 2025.

The Member Task and Finish Group steering the development of the new Local Transport Plan had met twice in 2024. Following the public consultation on the emerging plan last year, a full plan was being drafted. Engagement with district and borough councils at officer level was also underway and a full draft new Local Transport Plan was to be going back out to public consultation in summer 2024. All KCC Members were to be briefed in advance of this with the opportunity to influence the plan before the County Council vote on its adoption later in the year.

The newsletter detailed the engagement to date on the new Highways Term Maintenance Contract. Invitations had been issued for a second Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee Member meeting on 26 April.

2) Mr Thomas said he would continue to send the newsletter out in advance of meetings of Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee.

Contamination of waste had continued to be a problem and recycling weights in Kent needed to go up. The cost from contamination was high and so work was ongoing to make improvements across the county.

The data from the Windmills Consultation was to be presented at the next meeting of Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee.

Mr Thomas had been spending time with officers and he was looking forward to working with colleagues and in the community in his new role as Cabinet Member.

3) Mr Jones said there were four road inspectors appointed and they were receiving training. In addition to statutory inspections carried out they also carried out additional activity to consider;

· If the road is closed whether other forms of traffic management could have been utilised;

- Is the road closed but there is no work started;
- Is the work completed but the road is still closed;
- Is the road signage correct;
- Is the site safe; and
- Whether the diversion for the closure was suitable?

59 audits had been completed. It was found that three of the 59 closures could have had alternative traffic management options, three were closed but the work had not been started, three had been completed but were still closed, four had incorrect signage, five were unsafe of which three were KCC's own sites and all of the diversions were suitable for the road closure. Around 30% or 18 of these audits raised concerns and information about further work on these would be brought to a future meeting.

Women and young people were being encouraged to become engineers and 2024 saw the 9th year of the Challenge Cup sponsored by AMEY which sought to encourage girls into engineering. The latest event was to design and cost a replacement bridge and was held on 25 January and involved 14 schools.

Officers also attended a recruitment fair at East Kent College on 30 January where they spoke to many young people about careers in engineering and in KCC.

Work on Galley Hill continued and while legal issues were still being resolved, a contractor was in place for the stabilisation and investigation works.

The Road of Remembrance in Folkestone & Hythe remained closed and further land slips had occurred in recent weeks. Clearance work continued and the road was only be re-opened when it was safe enough.

On Lower Thames Crossing, KCC had sealed a legal agreement with National Highways to secure financial compensation for the potential loss of revenue at Shorne Woods Country Park as a result of the Lower Thames Crossing's six-year construction period. Further updates on the Lower Thames Crossing Development Consent Order application were not expected until June 2024 at the earliest after the Secretary of State had considered the Planning Inspectors' recommendation.

The examination of the Development Consent Order Application by Gatwick Airport for routine use of its standby northern runway commenced on 27 February and was to last for six months until the end of August. KCC was opposed to the expansion of Gatwick as set out in our policy on Gatwick Airport which had been in place for nearly 10 years following its adoption by Cabinet in December 2014.

This opposition was based on the noise impacts in west Kent being made worse by an increase in flights.

In addition, the DfT had launched a consultation on the next night flight regime for Heathrow, Gatwick, and Stansted (effective from October 2025 until October 2028). The consultation was to run until 22 May 2024 and sought views on proposals for movement and quota count limits for Gatwick Airport to maintain the same level of night flights as they were permitted in 2024. KCC's Transport Strategy team were to prepare a response to the consultation and Members would be contacted for their input.

In February 2024, Mr Jones joined 36 GET and Medway Valley Thursday Action Group volunteers at Boxley Farm cluster where they planted over 1,400 hedges in one day, helping to create a new 250m biodiverse native hedgerow.

A special thanks was given to Andrea Griffith for organising the day and Kent Downs National Landscapes who provided the funding.

4) Further to comments from Members, it was noted that:

- The assessment and risk profile on all the highway assets was an ongoing issue for KCC. The road and off-road network had been affected by weather conditions.
- There was discussion around Members receiving notifications on all road closures. Concerns were raised that there were cases where works had been completed but the road was still closed.
- Members were able to use a platform called One Network and sign up for alerts on road closures. It was proposed that Members be trained on how to use the platform.

5. Performance Dashboard

(Item 6)

Matt Wagner, Interim Chief Analyst; Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy and Simon Jones, Corporate Director, GET were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report and said that the data showed performance up to December 2023. There were 19 key performance indicators (KPIs); 13 were rated green, and the remaining 6 were rated amber.

There were two indicators where the 'year to date' performance were red but they were now amber, based on the latest performance.

There were some areas of challenge relating to Highways and Transportation, where demand for pothole repair and routine faults remained extremely high.

2) Mr Baker said that the performance data lag meant that where indicators were showing as green on the report, it did not mean that there are not problems on the roads at the time of the meeting.

3) Mr Jones reported that enquiries about potholes were very high at the time of the meeting, around 2 ½ times higher than the same time in 2023. Despite the high demand, the service was quickly working to get into a sustainable position.

There had been a significant improvement in the performance of the team dealing with correspondence and Members' enquiries. Other KPIs were also close to the target levels.

4) Further to Members' questions, it was noted:

- A query was raised about what customer satisfaction means and what is being measured: Is it the experience of reporting and engagement, or is it the outcome from the report made? It was clarified that it was about the engagement with customer. However, the question was to be explored in more depth.
- A Member had asked the Cabinet Member about the metric being used for the performance indicator for HT13 - Streetwork permits issued. The Cabinet Member agreed that a more useful indicator would be to show how many days had been 'lost' of road use.
- Members agreed that there should be a review of KPIs reported to the committee.

3) RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard.

6. Corporate Risk Register

(Item 7)

Mark Scrivener, Head of Risk and Delivery Assurance and Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy, were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Scrivener introduced the annual Corporate Risk Register report.

2) Members asked questions and the following was noted:

- Costs to KCC associated with Exit Entry System on other parts of the network (non-national routes) should be reflected in risks. National funding policy does not reflect the impact on KCC's Highways budget. The government funding mechanisms were not operating on volume of traffic but on network length.
- Concerns were raised that there was not enough emphasis on climate change impact and it was suggested that more should be done to look at adaptations strategy for climate change.
- A cross-directorate approach was being taken to achieving the government's Net Zero policy. A KCC adaptation strategy was being developed which was due to be completed in April 2024. There had been a series of meetings to look at adaptations to KCC's buildings and services, within the affordability envelope that the authority was operating within. Savings would come from what might happen in the future, so it was avoided future cost rather than budgeted cost. It was recognised that the organisation putting in the measure in place was not always the organisation that would benefit from it financially. Therefore, it was important to look at the overall picture of costs and savings.
- Mr Thomas had agreed to join a Kent and Medway partnership working on climate change issues.

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

7. Entry/Exit system

(Item 8)

Toby Howe, Strategic Resilience Manager; Haroona Chughtai, Director of Highways & Transportation, and Simon Jones Corporate Director, GET, were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Howe and Ms Chughtai introduced the report.

2) Members commented and asked questions and the following was noted:

- The Entry/Exit System (E/ES) was being initiated by the EU as UK citizens were now considered third country nationals and was to involve further customs checks, including biometric testing. Technical solutions had not been developed and passports would need to be seen and observed. There would be increased processing times because of the checks and the impact would be wider than on the network around Dover.
- KCC were in contact with central government around preparation and mitigation of the impacts of E/ES as a national issue. There were concerns about the longer term impact on passengers as well as issues around freight. In the longer term, it was hoped the process would be simplified but in the meantime, the legislation meant that the process could not be done 'from home'.
- It was suggested that the Leader should write to government and that representations be made to politicians, the DfT, DHLUC, and the Home Office.
- Rail alternatives could be explored to counter the issues around lorries.
- Concerns were raised around the impact on the wider infrastructure in Kent and potential for impact on AONBs.
- It was suggested that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and GET officers join the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to address the Straits Committee.

3) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Baldock seconded and Members agreed a motion to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways regarding the management of E/ES:

- a. To take positive action on controlling the movement of heavy goods vehicles and non-domestic freight in Kent from early October 2024, through strong representation to central government, the Home Office, DfT, and DHLUC;
- b. Encourage development of an application to enable Kent bound HGVs to be held (ideally in 'Golden Triangle' in the midlands and north of England).

4) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Hills seconded and Members agreed an additional motion to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member as follows:

To seek to negotiate with the unaccompanied freight ferry operators to establish what scope might be available to increase capacity at Purfleet and Tilbury, including bringing into use Dartford and Sheerness to keep freight out Operation Brock queues.

To work to set up passenger welfare facilities in advance of October 2024 to enable welfare of passengers delayed by Operation Brock.

5) Members resolved to note the report.

8. 24/00018 - Mobility as a Service (MaaS): Pilot

(Item 9)

Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport and Jacqui Elliott, Public Transport Project Manager/Lead for MaaS

1) Mr Lightowler introduced the report.

2) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Hills seconded and Members agreed to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report subject to the following being added to the recommendations:

During the current Medium Term Financial Plan, no KCC funds should be used in connections with the proposals related to the MaaS pilot.

9. 24/00015 - Moving Traffic Enforcement Policy

(Item 10)

Tim Read, Head of Transportation; Neil Edwards, Traffic Manager; and, Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport were in attendance

1) Mr Baker introduced the report.

2) Mr Edwards outlined the report.

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

- Concerns were raised that the act of ringfencing funds received from fines might detract from the reasons for the scheme, as it was not a 'cash cow'. The ambition for the policy was network management improvement.
- Members were advised that Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 applied and was bound to traffic and environmental schemes.
- It was intended that the enforcement would begin in mid to late April 2024.
- The fine amounts were set by government aligning with on-street parking fines which had not increased for many years. Central government was being lobbied on increasing fine amounts.

3) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Dendor seconded and Members agreed to endorse the recommendations outlined in the report subject to the addition of the following recommendation:

The funds received through this policy and fines imposed are ringfenced within GET directorate.

10. 24/00017 - Professional Services Framework Contract Award
(Item 11)

RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.

11. Update on the Future of the Gravesend to Tilbury Ferry Service
(Item 12)

Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport/Project Sponsor was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Baker introduced the report and he thanked Jetstream.

2) Mr Lightowler outlined the report.

3) Mr Rayner proposed and Mr Bond seconded:

That negotiations be ceased and the funds not be held over and that these be put towards bus services.

Following debate, the motion was withdrawn.

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

- There were arguments made that the benefits of the ferry were mostly to the benefit of residents of Thurrock and those around the Gravesham area. However, the impact on residents of Kent was recognised and that the termination of the service would result in children not being able to get to their school and others not being able to access their place of employment.
- Members were disappointed that the second-tier authority in Essex had not committed to securing the future of the ferry service.
- Officers were thanked for their efforts in trying to secure the future of the ferry service and supported future efforts by the Cabinet Member and officers to re-instate the service.

5) RESOLVED to note the report.

12. Work Programme
(Item 13)

The work programme was noted.