

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 Wednesday, 22 January 2025.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr C Broadley, Mr T Cannon, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms K Grehan, Mr M A J Hood, Mr S Manion, Mr J P McInroy, Ms J Meade, Mr J Meade and Mr M J Sole

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy, Mrs C Bell and Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Mr K Tilson (Finance Business Partner - Customer & Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Ms R Anderson (Head of Business Information, Strategy and Assurance), Mr C Finch (Strategic Programme Manager), Mr T Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place), Mrs S Nurden (Kent and Medway Economic Partnership's Strategic Programme Manager), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Mr M Rolfe (Head of Community Protection), Mr S Samson (Interim Head of Economy) and Mr M Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

238. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Holden and Mr Ridgers.

Mr Manion and Ms Grehan were present virtually.

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

(Item 3)

- 1) Mr Manion declared an interest in item - *Update on the implementation of the New Operating Model and Geographical Allocation Policy for the Community Warden Service* – that his neighbour was a Community Warden.
- 2) Mr Sole declared an interest in Item 11 - *24/00122 – Awarding of Local Nutrient Mitigation Funding to Local Planning Authorities for the delivery of mitigation schemes for Nutrient Neutrality in the Stour catchment* – that he was the Deputy Leader of Canterbury City Council.
- 3) Mr Sole declared an interest later in the meeting in Item 5 – *Draft Budget* - that a family member worked for the Council.

240. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2024 were a correct record.

241. Draft Revenue Budget 2025-26 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025-28 Update, and Draft Capital Programme 2025-35

(Item 5)

1. Mr Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, introduced the report. He provided a high level overview of the draft budget and welcomed recommendations for changes from Members. Mr Oakford said the draft revenue proposals were balanced in principle pending endorsement by Cabinet. The draft budget included the resolution of £11.5million unresolved balances included in the November draft budget and said some of the £19.8m policy savings in the November draft budget had slipped back a year meaning one-off savings had been used. The plans for 2026/2027 and 2027/2028 in the MTFP were based on a set of assumptions on current spending and savings, and were broadly balanced pending further details on reforms to local authority funding. Mr Oakford anticipated that the Council would support a 5% Council Tax increase which had been built into the budget. The biggest growth pressures were being seen in adult social care with providers seeing an approximate increase of 10% in their costs.
2. Mr Derek Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, explained the budget for his portfolio of £4.3million was approximately £265,000 under budget due to efficiencies.
3. Mrs Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, explained the budget for her portfolio of approximately £26million was £1.5million under budget due to management activity and some staff vacancies.
4. Mr Sole declared an interest that a family member worked for the Council.
5. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - In relation to how potential devolution and local government reorganisation plans could affect revenue and capital funding Mr Oakford confirmed the budget had been developed on the basis of 'business as usual' irrespective of future plans. Mr Oakford stressed the continued importance of reserves and close financial management.
6. RESOLVED to note the update to the administration's draft revenue budget proposals.

242. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 6)

Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registrations and Archives) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) At Herne Bay Library the Knit and Natter group had knitted over one hundred woolly hats which held essential supplies donated by TESCO for those in need and the Winter Coat Swap at Dover Library continued to provide warm clothing, whilst Sittingbourne, Herne Bay and Southborough Libraries hosted successful Christmas jumper swaps. In Bexley there was a Santa's grotto and at Danson House a Christmas market. Mrs Bell encouraged Members to keep promoting libraries as warm welcoming spaces all year round.
 - (b) On Wednesday 11 December libraries across the UK showed solidarity with Spellow Library in Liverpool which was damaged during riots in Summer 2024. Kent Libraries joined the nationwide Leave a Light On initiative symbolising the resilience of libraries and their role in uniting communities. Over 100 libraries participated across the county and it was featured on BBC's The One Show.
 - (c) Step into Digital Playground, a series of short films and podcasts, designed for families to enjoy together, encouraged viewers to explore the world in a new way and Mrs Bell thanked the Kent Family Hub for the funding.
 - (d) Active Kent and Medway closed a busy 2024 with its annual conference, attended by over 150 partners from across the county. Sport England were reporting increased activity levels amongst children and young people alongside news of two more years of funding for the Kent School Games. The new year saw the launch of a new Everyday Active January Challenge and support for a Smoking Cessation grants programme.
 - (e) On 26 December 2024 the government formally announced its intention to repeal the 2031 cut-off date for the recording of historic rights of way. Stakeholders broadly welcomed the move as the lack of exceptions risked the loss of historic, but unrecorded, public rights of way and the repeal may stem the increasing numbers of applications being received.
 - (f) The Trading Standards Checked scheme safeguards vulnerable residents by providing advice and a network of approved traders. Staff were expanding the scheme with new features like trader reviews and an upcoming Direct Debit payment option. Mrs Bell encouraged Members to promote the scheme.
 - (g) The Kent County Council Civil Society Strategy, introduced in 2019, detailed the Council's support for the social sector including infrastructure. A revision to the strategy was planned for this year.
 - (h) The Community Wardens were receiving NHS training to provide basic stop smoking advice and refer residents to local services. In the lead up to Christmas Community Wardens were present in Maidstone High Street at an event aimed at reducing violence against women and girls.

- (i) Domestic Abuse related death reviews remained high with 24 active cases. A webinar on parental conflict and domestic abuse was scheduled for 11 February.
 - (j) Kent Scientific Services found high hydrogen peroxide levels in dental whitening sticks intercepted by Trading Standards and investigations were continuing. Trading Standards' operation 'Adopt' which was a doorstep crime and fraud investigation had concluded. Trading Standards Manager Clive Philipps highlighted holiday scams on BBC Southeast with the interview reaching a national audience. The local vape action pilot in Tunbridge Wells had concluded its initial period and the findings were being drawn together in a report.
 - (k) The Kent Film Office has facilitated several high profile productions recently including Bird (2024) including rooftop scenes in Gravesend, Blitz (2024) which was shot at The Historic Dockyard Chatham and Whitstable Pearl Series 3 featuring locations such as Whitstable, Herne Bay, and Halstead in Sevenoaks. These three productions had collectively contributed an estimated £1.4 million to the Kent economy over 44 filming days and 84 preparation days.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- Evidence showed that the work of the Kent Film Office was linked to visitor numbers within Kent and there was a need to develop that relationship.
3. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
- (a) The Kent & Medway Business Fund continued to support local firms with loans to support job creation and growth. The boards had approved a further four loans in November and December to small businesses including to a company supporting the viticulture industry in Canterbury, a business planning service in Medway, a dog grooming business in Tonbridge and Malling. The total loans approved to date since the relaunch of the scheme in November 2023 was 38 with a combined value of almost £4.5 million.
 - (b) The No Use Empty scheme continued to attract significant media and external interest with Steve Grimshaw recently delivering a presentation to Central Bedfordshire Council's Empty Homes forum which included Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire councils. A letter to the Housing Minister, the MP for Liverpool Wavertree and a number of other MP co-signatories, highlighted NUE as a best practice example of how successful a national loan fund could be organised. NUE had returned 8,607 empty properties back into use since April 2005. 28 loans had been approved so far for this financial year with a value of £2.6million.
 - (c) The Integrated Strategy for Work and Health was out for consultation until mid-March. The Economy team, along with colleagues in Public Health

and the Integrated Care System were keen to hear from local businesses, employers, residents and other groups about how to best tackle economic inactivity locally, fill skills gaps faced by local firms and support people into work.

- (d) Work was ongoing with the implementation plan for the Kent & Medway Economic Framework. Recent work included a focus on the creation of an Innovation Partnership for Kent & Medway, the development of a new round of Getting Building Fund, further work to campaign for the re-introduction of international rail passenger services from Ashford & Ebbsfleet, running a series of workshops and training events to support local firms and add value to the Kent & Medway Growth Hub core functions.
 - (e) On 15 January Mr Murphy attended a reception with the Foreign Secretary for the Launch of UK Soft Power Council at Lancaster House, in London. The new council, which would be jointly chaired by foreign secretary David Lammy and culture secretary Lisa Nandy, would seek to underline the breadth and depth of the UK's strengths in areas such as culture, creative, sports, education and the science and technology industries.
 - (f) On 24 January Mr Murphy would be joining the campaign for Eurostar stopping at Ashford International station and filming a piece to camera setting out the economic benefits to Kent businesses and residents.
 - (g) On 3 December, Mr Murphy along with the Leader hosted David Maenaut, the General Representative of Flanders in the United Kingdom. This visit was arranged following the recent visits from Flanders officials and business representatives.
 - (h) On 12 and 13 December, Mr Murphy attended and presented at the UK-France Local Government Forum on behalf of the Leader. The Forum was a bi-annual conference looking at how British and French local government could work together and tackle the challenges of the future, such as cross-border cooperation and fluidity between countries. Travel for the event was paid for via a grant from the British Embassy in Paris.
4. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- The No Use Empty scheme was commended with specific credit given to Steve Grimshaw and his team for their work.
 - Continued communication with the district councils to raise awareness of the No Use Empty scheme was requested.
 - Support was expressed for the campaign for Eurostar to stop again at Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations.
5. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided a written update which was circulated to committee members before the meeting and included:
- (a) Contractual arrangements were finalised recently enabling Locate in Kent (LiK) to continue promoting inward investment opportunities in Kent &

Medway. Targets included attracting 20 new firms to the county and supporting the creation of 750 jobs. LiK was able to maintain a pipeline of around 100 companies at any given time.

- (b) The Kent Foundation which KCC supported, was celebrating 40 years of mentoring young entrepreneurs. A celebration event was planned for 18 February to look back at several businesses supported over the years and to look forward to future activities.
- (c) The County Council's Mineral and Waste Local Plan was submitted for independent examination in May 2024, with examination hearings in September 2024. The Council was awaiting the Planning Inspector's report which was anticipated this month. On the assumption that it was concluded that the Local Plan was sound and legally compliant, the County Council should be able to adopt the Plan this Spring. This would ensure that an up-to-date Local Plan would provide the policy framework for determining planning applications and ensure the planning for the County's minerals and waste management needs, whilst protecting the environment. Adoption of the Plan would be a decision for County Council.

6. RESOLVED to note the updates.

243. Performance Dashboard

(Item 7)

1. Ms Holt-Castle introduced the report which included the performance of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators for Quarter 2 of 2024/25. Ms Holt-Castle provided a brief overview of performance whereby 16 of the 22 KPIs were RAG rated green, 3 were amber, and 3 were red.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Teams within the LRA service attended local schools to promote the services of libraries. Support from Members was appreciated and encouraged and something that would be taken forward as part of the next summer reading challenge.
 - The summer reading challenge did not perform as well over the summer as had been hoped, this was a national trend. The themes of summer reading challenges were critical to its success and work continued with the Reading Agency regarding development of the challenge to ensure it appealed to school age children.
 - Although the events and activities target (LRA15) had not been met in this quarter a healthy recovery following the pandemic had been seen overall, the next quarter was looking more positive and Members were assured performance of events and activities was kept under review.
 - Targets were revisited each year and where it was felt there was opportunity targets were made more ambitious to increase performance.
3. RESOLVED to note the performance report for Quarter 2 of 2024/25.

244. 24/00116 - The Future of Library Provision in Folkestone Town Centre
(Item 8)

Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registration & Archives) and Ms Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell and Mr James Pearson introduced the report and explained that a public consultation on the future town centre location of the Folkestone Library and registration service had taken place along with analysis of the options available. Mr Pearson provided a summary of the results of the consultation and explained the options that had been considered, and the proposals made, as set out in the report. The two options to progress forward were to explore further to sell or issue a long lease for the Grace Hill building and then lease back part of the building for the library and explore an alternative leasehold site including the option of moving to FOLCA.
2. Ms Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure, explained that the Asset for Community Value (ACV) process was governed by legislation and enabled communities to ask for an asset to be listed. Ms Spore clarified that in relation to this matter the administrative body was Folkestone & Hythe District Council, and references in the report to disposal related to them starting the Asset for Community Value process. Once listed, KCC as landowner, would not be able to progress with the disposal or enter into a long leasehold, or any other arrangements in terms of the building that would constitute a disposal, unless KCC notified F&HDC, following which a six month monitoring period would start. During that six month period KCC would not be able to dispose of the building but would be able to enter discussions with organisations to develop proposals. KCC was not compelled to dispose of the building at the end of the six month period. Ms Spore confirmed, as set out in the report, that a final decision would be taken in terms of the long term permanent location of Grace Hill Library once those discussions had taken place.
3. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Further officer meetings would take place with Creative Folkestone later in the process to explore timing, viability and affordability of their idea. Conversations would take place alongside those with other community groups.
 - A number of conversations and exchange of correspondence had taken place with Creative Folkestone over the last 6-10 months. KCC could not gift property and the triggering of the ACV process would enable more detailed conversations and proposals to develop fairly and openly.
 - Transparency was required by the Council when considering proposals put forward from any organisation.
 - Work on different options should take place alongside each other.
 - The matter would come back to the relevant cabinet committee once all options had been considered and processes completed, before the decision was taken by the Cabinet Member.
4. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory services to:

- A. APPROVE to issue the draft consultation report set out in Appendix B.
- B. APPROVE to Issue the consultation response set out in Appendix C.
- C. Note that KCC remain committed to a full town centre library provision in Folkestone Town Centre.
- D. APPROVE that further work be undertaken to explore and implement an alternative town centre location for the temporary library and registration service, from which a greater range of services could be delivered, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre.
- E. APPROVE that the options for the future of the Grace Hill building which involve KCC retaining responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building, be discounted, acknowledging that this will require KCC to make a disposal of the building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease), and progress actions relating to its listing as an asset of Page 57 Agenda Item 8 community value (ACV), including issuing a notice of intention to dispose to Folkestone & Hythe District Council which triggers the AVC process;
- F. APPROVE that further work be undertaken on the two remaining options, including further engagement with Creative Folkestone and, if appropriate, other individuals or groups who may make proposals for the Grace Hill building (including through the ACV process).
- G. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to issue the draft consultation responses
- H. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Community and Regulatory Services to proceed with the work required on the remaining two options, noting that these will be subject to further governance and decision making
- I. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services 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 as shown at Appendix A
- J. Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services 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 as shown at Appendix A.

Post meeting note

Following the discussion at the Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet Member reviewed and updated the decision wording for bullet E. The original wording was ambiguous as it implied that Kent County Council was giving the building to Folkestone Hythe District Council, rather than issuing a notice to FHDC to trigger the ACV process.

245. 24/00103 - Governance Arrangements for Growing Places Funding (Item 9)

Ms Sarah Nurden (Strategic Programme Manager (KMEP)) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Sarah Nurden introduced the report which provided an overview of the proposed arrangements for the governance of a new round of Growing Places Funding following the closure of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.
2. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to:
 - Launch a new round of the Growing Places Fund (GPF) capital loan-based funding programme for Kent;
 - Approve the new governance arrangements for managing the GPF programme;
 - Act as the accountable body for projects within Kent's geographical boundaries that are to receive GPF loan funding; and
 - Delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take relevant actions including but not limited to entering contracts and/or other legal agreements as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

246. 24/00102 - Connect to Work Programme
(Item 10)

1. Mr Steve Samson introduced the report which provided an overview of the Department for Work and Pensions' 'Connect to Work' supported employment programme and plans to roll this out in Kent & Medway.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Data from the Integrated Care System would be used to identify target groups and a steering group would oversee monitoring and report into the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and Integrated Care Partnership.
 - The Get Britain Working white paper included the levels of people in employment and active engagement in employment in the UK which were not as high as those in the rest of Europe. The programme would aim to tackle this.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic development for Kent County Council to ACT as Accountable Body and oversee the delivery of the Kent & Medway element of the national 'Connect to Work' supported employment programme; and

To Delegate to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Corporate Director of Finance to take necessary actions including but not limited to entering into relevant contracts, or other legal agreements to implement this decision.

247. 24/00122 - Awarding of Local Nutrient Mitigation Funding to Local Planning Authorities for the delivery of mitigation schemes for Nutrient Neutrality in the Stour catchment
(Item 11)

Ms Louise Smith (Flood and Water Manager) and Mr Matthew Smyth (Director for Environment and Circular Economy) were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Louise Smith introduced the report regarding the award of government funding of £9.8m to the Council for nutrient neutrality mitigation works in East Kent.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - The aim of the proposed decision was to improve nutrient neutrality in the Stodmarsh catchment area in order to unlock housing development.
 - The Strategy document was a live document that captured the work taking place in the catchment going forward and further clarification in that regard would be considered.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic development to:
 - (i) Agree, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Traded Services to £9.8 million of funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, be used to award grant funding to Local Authority partners to deliver mitigation schemes for Nutrient Neutrality in the Stour catchment.
 - (ii) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in agreement with the Cabinet Member for Environment, and Cabinet Member for Economic Development to nominate an officer as an observer to sit on the executive board of Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council joint venture company Stour Environmental Credits Ltd which will deliver mitigation schemes on their behalf.
 - (iii) Agree to the adoption of the Stodmarsh Nutrient Neutrality Strategy to support the awarding of grant funding to Local Authority partners.
 - (iv) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to take 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.

248. 24/00104 - External Grant Funding Acceptance by Kent County Council on behalf of Active Kent & Medway
(Item 12)

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and explained that Active Kent & Medway was externally funded and the proposed decision was for the Council to act as the

accountable and host body for the Active Kent & Medway Partnership and accept funding to support the delivery of the activity.

2. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services:

- To ENDORSE Kent County Council acting as the accountable and host body for the Active Kent & Medway Partnership and permit the acceptance of funding to support the delivery of the Kent & Medway Strategic Framework for Sport and Physical Activity 2023-2027. (Move Together - ActiveKent)
- To ENDORSE the Kent County Council and Active Kent & Medway Memorandum of Understanding for Hosting 2023-2027.
- To DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services and the S151 Officer or Cabinet Member for Finance to accept and deploy grants and other external funding to support the delivery of the Kent & Medway Strategic Framework for Sport and Physical Activity; including future years allocations, providing it is on the same terms and conditions as previous grant funding.
- To DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take necessary actions including but not limited to entering into relevant contracts, or other legal agreements to implement this decision.

249. Update on the implementation of the New Operating Model and Geographical Allocation Policy for the Community Warden Service
(Item 13)

Mr Shafick Peerbux (Head of Community Safety, Community Protection Group) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and said the implementation of the new operating model and geographical allocation policy was now in place. Mrs Bell recognised that due to the reduction of community wardens some divisions were not benefitting from the changes. Mrs Bell said interest had been shown by some parish councils to fund or part fund a warden and officers were exploring options.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Further information relating to wardens in specific divisions would be provided.
 - If a parish council funds a warden in most cases the warden would remain an employee of the Council.
3. RESOLVED to note the progress made in implementing the new service model and geographical allocation policy, and delivering the savings required.

250. 2024 Infrastructure Funding Statement

(Item 14)

Mr Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Colin Finch introduced the report and provided a summary of the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement which included the financial position relating to Developer Contributions for the previous financial year.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - In a Section 106 agreement there was normally a 10 year time limit for school and road developments although the time period may vary, for example if a school was funded by multiple different development contributions with different timescales.
 - Section 106 contributions had to be directly related to a particular development.
3. RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

251. Presentation from Visit Kent

(Item 15)

This item was taken after Item 8.

1. Ms Deirdre Wells OBE, CEO of Visit Kent, provided a presentation, a copy of which was included in the agenda pack.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - The data relating to visitor numbers was taken from a range of sources which included Airbnb and hotels. There was a shortage of hotel beds in Kent but new developments would serve business tourism as well as domestic.
 - Although Kent was largely recognised as the Garden of England it was important to recognise its diversity and target different aspects of the county based on research.
3. RESOLVED to note the presentation.

252. Work Programme 2025

(Item 16)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.