

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 26 September 2024.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mrs C Bell, Mrs S Chandler, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr D Watkins, Mr R J Thomas, Mr J P McInroy and Mr H Rayner

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr R Smith (Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health) Mr D Whittle (*Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance*), Ms C Head (*Head of Finance Operations*), Mr J McKay (Acting Chief Accountant) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

62. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Oakford and Mr Murphy. Mr Rayner and Mr McInroy were present on their behalf.

63. Declarations of Interest

(Item)

There were no declarations of interest.

64. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 July 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 11 July 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair

65. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1. Mr Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) On Thursday 19th September, Mr Watkins visited the Fusion Healthy Living Centre in Maidstone. The Centre offered information, advice and support to residents of Park Wood and the wider Maidstone community and provided targeted support to groups within the community which represented some of the most disadvantaged sectors in relation to health inequalities. The centre offered a broad range of activities to help local people keep healthy including

help and support to get people into employment. Mr Watkins thanked all those involved in the visit. .

- (b) The Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance visit was due to take place on the week commencing 30th September 2024. The CQC assessment framework provided an independent evaluation of how well local authorities in England met their duties under the Care Act 2014.
 - (c) The 10th September marked World Suicide Prevention Day. The Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention team had worked with the charity Living Words to produce a short film 'Living Warriors' which demonstrated the importance of changing the narrative on suicide and to 'start the conversation.' Free training and support was available. Mr Watkins thanked all those involved.
2. Mrs Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, provided an update on the following:
- (a) In 2023 the Department for Education (DfE) published an updated version of the 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' initiative which removed the requirement for qualified Social Workers to work with Children in Need. This meant that alternatively qualified practitioners with the necessary skills and experience, including Social Work Assistants, Early Help Practitioners and Education and Health professionals could hold children in need case work. Implementation of the lead professional's role would be trialled across Integrated Children's Services, with experienced Social Work Assistants as the lead professional. The six-month pilot was due to launch in October 2024, following which an evaluation would be carried out by the practice development team.
 - (b) Staff from across the various teams within the Adolescent and Youth Justice service provided their views on the service redesign. These were carefully considered alongside those from quality assurance, service managers, HR advisors, business support managers and the communication team and balanced against findings from inspections, audits and other quality assurance activities. The findings had been condensed into several proposals which would be taken forward.
 - (c) Mrs Chandler expressed thanks to the staff within the Family Hubs for the support they offered to thousands of children during the school summer holidays which received positive feedback from both children and parents. A further schedule was forthcoming for the December 2024 school holiday period.
 - (d) From September 2024 Early Help workers would be based in Family Hubs to ensure that families only told their stories once and received timely, targeted support to ensure children reached their full potential and would be school-ready.
 - (e) Two further reception centres were due to open in September 2024 to help accommodate the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). The recent number of UASC referrals had proved to be a challenge, however, Mrs Chandler paid tribute to all staff within the service for their

continued hard work which enabled Kent County Council to continue to deliver its statutory duty.

3. Mr Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, provided an update on the following:

(a) The Minister for Children and Families had lifted Kent County Council's SEND statutory improvement notice as a result of the administration's evidenced ambition to drive change for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The letter from the Minister highlighted the strengthened capacity and strong governance arrangements, alongside a renewed commitment from senior leaders and improved partnership working across the local area which had increased the pace of change over the past 16 months. Mr Love was pleased to give the administration's collective commitment that the provision of SEND services remained a priority for all in the local area, with the pace of change and reforms set to continue.

(b) On 15th August 2024 Mr Love visited Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Faversham for A-Level results day where he had the opportunity to meet with students, 2 of whom received confirmed places at Oxford; and had the opportunity to see the new sports hall and theatre, both of which had been a result of the school's own successful fund raising initiatives. Sarah Hamilton, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills also had an opportunity to visit Northfleet Technology College for GCSE results day, where she met with students and visited both the nature reserve and science garden, equipped with bee hives.

(c) On 13th August Mr Love visited one of Kent's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programmes at West Kent Primary School in Gravesend and was joined by Stephen Morgan, Under Secretary of State for Early Education, and Labour MP Lauren Sullivan. Mr Love paid tribute to Terri Wright, Director of T W Tutors who was commissioned to run the vast range of activities for the children. Mr Love expressed his eagerness to hear the Government's renewed commitment to the HAF programme in the autumn budget.

4. Mr Baker, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, provided an update on the following:

(a) The processing and issuing of the Kent Travel Saver passes had gone well and the number of students that had applied had been similar to previous years despite the increased cost to the user.

(b) On 5th September Mr Baker attended a parliamentary reception organised by Julia Lopez, MP for Hornchurch and Upminster and Jim Dickson, MP for Dartford to promote the importance of the government making a decision on the Lower Thames Crossing. The Secretary of State was due to make a decision on the development Control Order (DSO) on 4th October. A number of public engagement sessions were underway across Dartford and Gravesham, organised by National Highways.

(c) On 11th September Mr Baker attended a site visit at Galley Hill Road, joined by Lilian Greenwood, Minister for Future Roads, to discuss the issues that had

been caused by the collapse of the road. Urgent government support was required to enable the road to be re-opened. The investigation work had concluded and a report identifying the cause of the collapse was forthcoming. A cost-option analysis was also due to be developed and a final report would be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) by the end of October 2024. Mr Baker also highlighted to the Minister the number of highway issues at the centre of town which had been caused by water removing the sub-surface of the roads.

- (d) The Public Consultation on the Local Transport Plan 5 was due to close on 8th October. Mr Baker encouraged the public to comment on the consultation document as it outlined Kent County Council's transport priorities and would shape how the Council engaged with the new Government to ensure that the essential schemes across the county could be funded and delivered. The Local Transport Plan 5 would be presented to Full Council in due course.
 - (e) An updated 5 Year Forward Works Programme had been produced covering planned work from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029. The programme was published on the [kent.gov website](https://www.kent.gov.uk). Mr Baker noted that the programme was subject to regular review and could be updated throughout the planned period.
 - (f) Kent County Council's Active Travel funding had been upgraded from 1 to 2 which meant that KCC was eligible for further funding going forward and reflected the amount of work that had been undertaken by the team.
 - (g) A number of engagement events had been held with staff as part of the Active Travel Interventions scheme, which offered bike training, bespoke route planning and Dr Bike for ad-hoc repairs. The Swale Recycle Project was used to provide refurbished bikes to staff, that had been restored by inmates from HMP Swaleside. Mr Baker hoped to roll the scheme out further across the county in the future.
 - (h) As of 3rd September, contractors had have delivered 208,849 square metres of patching and had filled 5,326 holes.
5. Mr Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment, provided an update on the following:
- (a) Mr Thomas highlighted to Members the work carried out by Kent County Council as the lead Local Flood Authority as the winter season approached. The Kent Local Flood Risk Management Strategy identified objectives to manage local flood risk to local communities and over the course of ten years aimed to prevent 100 houses from flooding. Work was underway with the Environment Agency, Southern Water and other agencies to manage flood defences and updates would be presented to the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee.
 - (b) The Sevenoaks Waste Transfer Station opened on 4th September. The new site had been designed to have the infrastructure that would allow for waste to be disposed of sustainably well into the future. It also enabled the recycling of more waste by Sevenoaks District Council and accommodated the Government's requirements as part of the Simpler Recycling legislation.

- (c) Planning permission had been submitted for a new Waste Transfer Station at Folkestone and Hythe. The infrastructure was required to ensure sustainable waste disposal for both current and future developments and to support future legislative requirements.
- (d) The Trade Waste Service had been reintroduced at the Dover facility to meet the growing needs of the commercial sector in the locality. Extensive planning modifications were required at site. The accepted materials included bulky waste, green waste, paper, card and wood which was to be phased at later date.
- (e) The pop-up recycling shop at Allington was due to become permanent from 2025. Planning permission had been submitted and FCC was leading on the procurement to find a Kent charity to run the shop under a partnership agreement.
6. Mr McInroy, Deputy Cabinet Member for Growth and Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
- (a) Work was underway to take forward the action areas set out in the Kent and Medway Economic Framework that was published in March 2024. The five ambitions set out within the framework included:
- a submission of a bid to the Department for Transport (DfE) to run a series of skills boot camps to tackle employment needs
 - to establish of new strategic partnership for health and economy. The first meeting was scheduled to take place in October 2024.
 - making a case to the new Government regarding the ongoing impact on the county from the lack of international passenger rail services from Ebbsfleet and Ashford
 - the development of a place based innovative partnership; and
 - the development of a Work and Health strategy for Kent and Medway to tackle barriers that prevented peopled from gaining employment due to health issues
- (b) Since the relaunch of the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) in November 2023, 19 new business loans had been approved totalling £2.75m which was projected to achieve 128 full time equivalent jobs. Among the recipients were an Environmentally friendly dry cleaners in Medway, a child nursery in Swale, 2 life sciences in Sandwich and an arts and recreation business in Tonbridge and Malling.
- (c) The Annual Taste of Kent awards took place on 13th June celebrating winners and finalists from very best of Kent's food and drink sector across 27 categories.
- (d) The Kent Foundation which supported young entrepreneurs through mentoring had produced a new 6 part online course with various materials to help individuals with an idea to star their own business, moving from idea to income. This had been supported through KCC's Helping Hands Fund.

- (e) The No Use Empty scheme had brought more than 8300 properties back into use since 2005. Since April there had been 15 empty home loans approved worth £1.7m and 7 new builds worth £4m which would achieve 34 new homes. A number of projects were nearing completion, including a former police station in Deal, along with the conversions of 6 new apartments and 6 new homes on the site of a former pub that had been empty for three years in Dover.
 - (f) The official opening of Asymchem at Discovery Park took place on 2nd August 2024, attended by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and the Leader of KCC along with the CEO of the Asymchem Group, Dr Hao Hong and the CEO of Discovery Park, Mayer Schreiber. Asymchem Laboratories utilised innovative technologies to enable smarter, greener, and cost-effective solutions to support manufacture of pharma services and supply.
7. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
- (a) Over the course of the summer over 16,000 children took part in the annual library reading challenge, with this year's theme being Marvelous Makers. Libraries hosted a number of activities and events which supported children to read over the summer period and ensured they were prepared for the new school term. Mrs Bell joined the launch of the challenge in the Margate library and expressed her delight in seeing the high level of engagement from children with the coordinator.
 - (b) Mrs Bell attended the launch of the Hope Project: Weaving Communities Together. The free exhibition was held at the Kent History and Library Centre and was inspired by inclusive arts practitioner, Elaine Foster-Gandey. The exhibition showcased the work of local Nepalese artist Abitra Alley and highlighted the Nepalese and Gurkha communities, supported by items from the Kent archive collection and explored themes of journey, migration and settlement in Kent.
 - (c) The Local Vape Action (LVA) initiative was due to launch on 27th September 2024. The scheme aimed to bring together key stakeholders from Kent Public Health, Kent Police, Kent Trading Standards, Tunbridge Wells Community Support Units and Independent British Vape Trade Association. The LVA project would allow all partners to come together to increase awareness of legal products and who to sell them to and was a positive additional step to the work already underway. The project would contribute to raising compliance, providing more robust support to retailers, reduce confusion and strengthen the safeguards to ensure children were not sold any device.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

66. 24/00077 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - June 2024-2025
(Item 5)

John Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance) Cath Head (Head of Finance Operations) and Joe McKay (Acting Chief Accountant) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Rayner (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) introduced the report that set out the revenue and capital budget monitoring position as at June 2024-25 (Quarter 1). The forecast revenue outturn position was an overspend of +£16.3m (excluding schools), which represented 1.1% of the revenue budget. Overspends were being reported in Adult Social Care & Health (+£16.5m), Children, Young People & Education (+£0.1m), Growth Environment & Transport (+£6.2m) and Corporately Held Budgets (+£2.3m). Underspends were being reported in Chief Executive's Department (-£0.9m), Deputy Chief Executive's Department (-£0.9m) and Non Attributable Costs (-£7.1m). The Schools' Delegated budgets were reporting an overspend of +£23.1m. From the savings target of £111.2m, the current forecasted position indicated a £93.3 in year saving to be delivered. The savings would continue to be monitored closely across teams within the organisation as non-delivery of savings would have a significant impact on the future years' budget. It was critical that the overspend be reduced to as near a balanced position as possible as any overspend would weaken the Council's future financial stability. The use of reserves for one off solutions would need to be replenished. The forecast outturn capital position indicated a real overspend of £7.7m and a rephasing variance of -£63.1m (a net underspend of £55.4m). Capital budget adjustments required Cabinet approval.
2. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - In relation to the financial pressures within the Growth, Environment and Transport directorate, it was highlighted that the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme passes issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) had placed a £3m pressure on KCC due to the change in the reimbursement calculation whereby local authorities were required to pay bus operators for carrying concessionary passholders. Furthermore, unplanned incidents such as those relating to the need to replace the jet fans in Chestfield tunnel created further budgetary pressures for the directorate. These demonstrated areas of financial pressure faced by the Council which were not foreseen and where further savings would need to be made to offset those spends.
 - In regard to the Dedicated Schools Grant budget, work was underway to bring this back under control and onto a sustainable footing. Those changes would start to be seen in later iterations of financial reporting. The Council continued to spend more than it was funded for through the Government's national funding formula and this needed to end. The reforms which were being taken forward by the Council, which included the Special Schools Review and the locality model amongst others all aimed to improve the offer for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and provide long-term solutions which were also fair on the council tax-payer.
 - The Adult Social Care budget was in a more positive position compared to the same period last year, however, whilst the forecast position indicated that the directorate was 3% off its targeted budget, this equated to £16.5m of savings that had to be achieved. For those projects where savings had

not yet been achieved, replacement savings would need to be found in-year. Reasons for delay included transformation programmes taking longer to deliver due to the scale of process and/or technology change, there was also a reliance on partnership organisations to help deliver savings, some of which did not move at the pace required which impacted on the ability to meet the in-year savings. Assurance was provided that work would continue at pace within the directorate to deliver the reforms.

3. The Leader commented on the improved position in terms of the projected overspend compared to the same period last year and recognition was paid to staff across the organisation in managing the increased cost and demand within services and the ability to still meet savings which was an important achievement. However, further improvement was required and the delivery of savings would only be achieved through the continued use of spending controls. The Leader paid recognition to the Children's, Young People and Education department for the work undertaken to bring it into budget.

4. RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the forecast revenue overspend of £16.3m (excluding Schools).
- b) Note the forecast overspend on Schools' Delegated Budgets of £23.1m.
- c) Note the forecast capital underspend of £55.4m.
- d) Note the progress on the delivery of savings.
- e) Agree the Revenue budget changes.
- f) Agree the Capital budget changes.
- g) Note the Reserves Monitoring
- h) Note the Prudential Indicators Monitoring

67. Quarterly Performance Report, Q1 2024-2025
(Item 6)

David Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Whittle outlined the report for Quarter 1 (Q1) which set out the performance data up to the end of June 2024. Mr Whittle said that out of the 40 KPIs contained within the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), 17 achieved or exceeded target (rated Green), 14 achieved or exceeded the floor standard but did not meet the target (rated Amber), and 8 did not meet floor standard (rated Red). The direction of travel analysis indicated 11 with a positive trend (2 more than the previous Quarter); 21 were stable or with no clear trend (one more than the previous Quarter), and 7 were showing a negative trend (2 fewer than the previous Quarter). The data was significantly different from Q1 for 2023-2024 where only 4 indicators had a positive trend and 10 were showing a negative trend. In relation to improving KPIs. Mr Whittle addressed the KPIs assessed as Red, those indicating signs of improvement and those which continued to exceed target.
2. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:

- In response to the number of potholes repaired, performance continued to improve since the introduction of KCC Highways staff completing minor and urgent repairs, however, the level of demand continued to be high. The number of pothole repair requests had risen from 5,376 to 7,856 for the same period last year. Mr Baker paid tribute to all staff for their exceptional and continued hard work which kept the county moving.
 - In response to the statistics for the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued within 20 weeks, it was noted that the data was based on a rolling 12-month average and therefore the impact of the significant work that had been undertaken within the SEND service to improve delays would only come to fruition in the Q1 KPIs. It was anticipated that significant improvement would start to be seen in the like-for-like comparison to previous quarters going forward.
 - In response to Ofsted inspection data which highlighted Kent's schools as performing above the national average, it was noted that the data would be discontinued following Government's proposed reforms to Ofsted grading. It was noted that the removal of Ofsted ratings concealed information from parents that would help to shape their choices of school for their child's future.
 - Members commented on the improvements to the Strengthening Independence Service and the hard work of staff.
 - In response to the percentage of case-holding Social Worker posts held by permanent qualified Social Workers, it was noted that a number of initiatives had been rolled out to ensure increased retention and recruitment rates, which included joining the national front line charity initiative to increase recruitment capacity and training. The Government had also issued new guidelines for agency Social Workers which placed more restrictions on the ability of Social Workers to transfer to agency work, which as a result could hinder the Council's ability to retain them. The impact of those changes would not be seen until later quarters.
 - In regard to Care Leavers, it was noted that the percentage of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Care Leavers was greater than Kent Care Leavers. However, the data pertaining to the percentage of unaccompanied young people not in education, employment or training remained high due to the timing of when they entered the country and therefore remained without status. Confirmation had been received from the Home Office that those young people without status would have their applications prioritised which would then help them to participate in employment, education or training.
 - It was noted that a number of deep dives had been initiated as a result of the KPI data to address what could be done to shift those which were RED rated onto a more positive trajectory; however, work would continue to look at areas for improvement, particularly in relation to the financial pressures.
3. RESOLVED to note the Quarter 1 Performance Report and the actions being taken to address areas where performance is not as targeted.

