

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 28 November 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 Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mr D Watkins and Mr R J Thomas

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Mrs S Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mr J Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance), Alesbrook (Financial Hardship Programme Manager), Mr R Ellis (Director of Integrated Commissioning), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), McKay (Acting Chief Accountant), Shulver (Head of Environment) and Mr M Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

68. Apologies

(Item 1)

No apologies were received.

69. Declarations of Interest

(Item 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

70. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 September 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 26 September 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair

71. 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 21st November Mr Watkins attended the House of Commons to co-chair the launch of the Social Care Commission for Assistive Technology (ATech); a project overseen by Policy Connect. The commission ran alongside the Kent and Medway Digital Skills Innovation in Healthcare Project which was funded by the Local Skills Improvement Fund and aimed to improve digital skills and the use of technology in the health and care sector by delivering training to both incoming and existing care

professionals. The project included the establishment of six assistive technology learning hubs in colleges across Kent and Medway. Mr Watkins visited the hub based at Canterbury college and commented on the impressive range of technology available within the training suite. The Commission would also look at ways in which service users could be best supported to adopt the technology which would assist people in living independent and healthier lives for longer. The implementation of ATech across the country would be supported by policy roundtable events, interviews and the review of specialist literature and data to ensure fully informed recommendations were presented to policy makers at all levels of Government. The Commission was sponsored by Kent County Council, Medway Council and Kent Further Education. Much of the work correlated to that of Kent County Council's in-house service, Technology Enabled Lives, which had made good progress since its launch. The progression of assistive technology would help to alleviate a significant part of the budgetary pressures faced by the Council.

(b) Mr Watkins, alongside the Kent Integrated Care Alliance, continued to lobby Government regarding the significant additional costs for social care services and the impact that this would have on the social care budget; most notably the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions, which would absorb much of the £600m grant funding announced by Government for 2025-26. Funding for services was already incredibly difficult and the financial challenge would continue until the Government provided adequate social care funding to local authorities.

(c) Mr Watkins paid thanks to all those involved in the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance visit that took place at the end of September and awaited receipt of the report.

(d) A number of visits had taken place throughout the autumn, including:

- Fusion Healthy Living Centre in Maidstone
- Southfield Short Break Centre
- Drug and alcohol treatments service providers, including Change Grow Live in Folkestone, and the Forward Trust in Ashford
- One You shop on Ashford High Street
- Ebbsfleet Garden City
- Revival Cafe in Whitstable
- Blackburn Trust in Maidstone and the Tenterden Social Hub

Mr Watkins expressed his thanks to all those involved in facilitating the visits which provided an opportunity for valuable discussions.

(e) Furthermore, Mr Watkins attended:

- Dementia Friendly Kent Awards on 21st October,
- Kent Care Awards on 13th September

- Kent and Medway Health and Care Symposium at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Gravesend on 31st October

Mr Watkins expressed his thanks to all those involved in the events

(f) The following consultations had been launched:

- [Proposed changes to wellbeing services in the community](#) – 26th November to 27th January 2025
- [Postural Stability Service](#) – 6th November to 17 December 2024

2. Mrs Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children’s Services, provided an update on the following:

(a) On 18th November the Department for Education (DfE) published a policy statement titled ‘Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive: Breaking Down the Barriers to Opportunity.’ The statement sets out government’s commitment to keeping families together. Mrs Chandler drew attention to the commentary within the paper regarding independent care providers and the rebalancing of the system towards preventative work, of which further information was eagerly awaited. There had also been an indication of additional funding and continued support for Family Hubs, which was very welcome. Further details were yet to be announced.

(b) On the 14th of November, Kent County Council hosted a visit to the two new reception centres, accompanied by the Minister for Children and Families, Janet Daby, and the Minister of State at the Home Office, Dame Angela Eagle, alongside senior leaders from Home Office and Department for Education. It was a positive visit, with ministers impressed by how the centres were operating.

Discussions were also held on improvements to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the need for a national response to accommodate newly arriving Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

Kent County Council had six reception centres in operation that provided temporary homes for UAS children, all of which had been successfully registered with Ofsted either as a children's home (for those aged under 16) or supported accommodation (for those aged 16 or 17).

The Home Office incentivised funding between May and October 2024 had improved the NTS transfer times for children; however, work would continue with the Home Office to confirm future arrangements to ensure that the NTS was equitable and effective for all UAS children and the Local Authority.

(c) Mrs Chandler attended the National Agenda and Reforms Conference and Kent Academy Social Care Awards on the 24th October. The conference

included guest speakers, the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, and the National Director of Ofsted, all of whom who gave their perspective on the national reforms. The awards recognised the great work that had been undertaken across the county by children's services.

(d) Mrs Chandler attended the annual Foster Carer Award ceremony and paid tribute to all those who won this year's awards, which highlighted the extraordinary work undertaken by Kent's Foster Carers every day.

(e) Our Children and Young People in Care Council won first place at the Coram National Voice Awards 2024 for a project called Listen Up, a short film about the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people.

(f) Kent County Council had also won the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, Team of the Year award for the 18 plus food bank project.

(g) The Corporate Parenting Christmas Appeal had been launched in partnership with the Young Lives Foundation with a target of reaching £25,000, which if achieved would provide each care leaver with a £10 voucher and offer 50 young adult care leavers the chance to attend and share a Christmas Day dinner. Details could be found on [The Young Lives Foundation fundraising page](#) and would be circulated to Members and staff over the coming days.

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

(a) Mr Love reported on his attendance at recent events which included:

- The opening of the new sport and teaching block at the Borden Grammar School in Sittingbourne
- The Newly Appointed Headteacher Welcome Event, jointly run by Kent County Council and the Kent Association of Leaders in Education (KALE)
- The KALE annual conference in Ashford, joined by the Leader, Mr Gough
- The School Funding Forum held in October where Mr Ben Cooper, Executive Headteacher of Swalecliffe Community Primary School, was formally appointed at the Forums new Chair.

(b) The procedures that had been put in place by the SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board to support the SEND improvement programme had delivered the required outcomes. Reporting arrangements had therefore reduced to a business as usual basis. Mr Love paid thanks to the independent Chair for the work and support provided over the last eighteen months.

- (c) Mr Love advised that since the last performance report presented to Cabinet, the completion of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued within 20 weeks had significantly improved with three out of four being issued within timescale and the oldest case being 26 weeks old. Mr Love commented on the Council's achievements and provided assurance that the reforms, which had been recognised and endorsed by the Minister for Children and Families, would continue to be delivered at pace.
4. Mr Baker, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, provided an update on the following:
- (a) The Pothole Blitz had concluded on 31st October. During its operation contractors had delivered 229,622 square metres of patching.
 - (b) Preparations had commenced as part of the winter service launch, including the deployment of gritters and teams would continue to be placed on standby to ensure that Kent's roads remained safe and accessible through the removal of debris and excess water caused through increased drainage pressure.
 - (c) Announcements had been made from Government on additional bus funding which would enable Kent County Council to support buses for an additional year, however, details were yet to be received. Mr Baker noted that whilst the funding was welcomed, it would probably only provide the Council with the ability to maintain the current network. The anticipated White Paper from Government on an Integrated Transport Strategy would help to inform the former bus funding announcement and details were eagerly awaited.
 - (d) The European Entry/Exit System (EES) which was due to come into force in November had been delayed due to concerns of readiness raised by several EU member states, including France, Germany and the Netherlands. There had been no further announcement on the new proposed date of implementation; however, Mr Baker noted the benefits of delay to Kent in ensuring that the discussions remained focused on improved accessibility in and out of Dover when delays do occur as a result of the EES.
 - (e) The second parish seminar of the year was conducted in person (the first time in a number of years) and was well attended by both the parish and town council representatives. Mr Baker commented on the importance of strong working relationships with local tiers of government and the positive discussions that stem from those relations. Mr Baker noted that future seminars would look to take the form of workshops to share best practice and to review ways in which this could be rolled out across the county.
 - (f) The consultation for the Local Transport Plan 5 had closed and was due to be presented to Full Council in December 2024. The document clearly

captured Kent County Council's vision for the future in terms of what was needed in Kent in light of the unprecedented amount of change expected. It provided the basis for discussions to be held with the Department for Transport (DfT) and others on modes of transport and how to keep the road networks flowing.

5. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Growth and Economic Development, provided an update on the following:

(a) The No Use Empty Scheme had recently gained media attention through the BBC One Show and Radio Kent. Furthermore, following a letter to Matthew Pennycook, Minister in Housing, the team were invited to give a presentation on the No Use Empty Scheme to Government policy advisors who wished to explore how the scheme could be applied to manage empty housing. Ealing and Bedfordshire councils had also approached Kent County Council to enquire about the scheme in hope of finding a solution to 6000 empty properties. Kent County Council had also been invited to attend as guest speakers at the National Empty Homes Conference in Birmingham in May 2025.

Since 2005 there had been 8,501 properties brought back into life through the scheme which included commercial and residential, which has accommodated housing for over 3000 people. The Tridax units at Dover had also supported 110 jobs and was the Council's largest development to date.

(b) Mr Murphy and the Leader were due to host David Maenaut, General Representative of Flanders in the United Kingdom, following the recent visits from Flanders officials and business representatives, including the Governor of West Flanders, earlier this year, to discuss increased trade alongside cultural and research links between Kent County Council and the Flanders region.

(c) Mr Murphy had also recently attended and presented at an international conference in Dunkirk which focused on sustainable growth within the tourism, residential and industrial sectors. The presentation was well received and it was noted that Kent County Council had been the only political representative present.

(d) A meeting of the Straits Committee was held in Ghent on the 25th and 26th November. Part of those discussions included the possibility of Kent County Council receiving unspent Interreg funding. Furthermore, Mr Murphy announced that a joint Straits Committee Eurostar declaration, which would include the frequency of trains through Lille, would be issued in due course. Assurance was also provided regarding the continuation of projects to address the issue of water management.

(e) Mr Murphy was due to attend the UK-France Local Government Forum on the 12th and 13th December, hosted by Leeds City Council. The forum was

an opportunity to exchange views, including topics of cross-border cooperation and fluidity between countries, with presentations due to be conducted by Dr Abigail Taylor, Research Fellow at the City Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI) at the University of Birmingham, whose research involved cross-border relationships and international relations. Travel for the event was paid for via grant from the British Embassy in Paris

- (f) The Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) had received 19 successful applications for small business loans since July 2024, amounting to £1.35m that had been given to small businesses in Kent, across a number of sectors.
 - (g) On 21st November, the Leader and Mr Murphy attended the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce annual dinner. Mr Mark Quinn was presented with the Outstanding Contribution to Kent Award for his incredible work for both charities and businesses within Kent.
6. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
- (a) The Libraries, Registration and Archives Service had successfully retained its customer service excellence standard following a four day assessment. The independent assessor praised the staff's enthusiasm, local knowledge, and ability to innovate and connect with diverse communities. The organisation was described as providing a gold star service with a positive working culture that valued both staff and residents. Mrs Bell congratulated the service for their outstanding report.
 - (b) Kent Libraries continued to participate in the Warm Welcome Campaign, which offered safe and inclusive spaces for residents during the winter season, especially needed due to the high cost of living and changes to the winter fuel allowance. The initiative had received public recognition, including coverage by ITV Meridian who attended Margate Library.
 - (c) Mrs Bell was joined by Lord Michael Bichard, Chairman of National Trading Standards, on a visit to Kent County Council's Trading Standards Ports Team in Dover. The visit provided an opportunity to demonstrate the critical work being done to protect Kent's borders, including efforts undertaken to prevent illegal vape imports. The visit to the Port of Dover also exposed the challenges faced by the team on a daily basis in the interception of dangerous products. Lord Bichard requested that a report on the issues be provided that could be used to support discussions at a national level.
 - (d) Mrs Bell attended the launch of the Local Vape Action Project in Tunbridge Wells. This initiative, led by the legitimate vape supply industry through the Independent British Vape Trade Association, was focused on ensuring that only legal, safe vape products were sold and that under age sales were prevented. Tunbridge Wells was selected as the trial location due to its

unique characteristics, including a large number of vape shops and a high concentration of young people who congregated in the area after school hours. The launch attracted strong media attention with coverage from Kent Online and ITV Meridian. If successful, the initiative would be rolled out nationwide, setting a benchmark for ensuring safety and legality in the vape industry.

(e) Mrs Bell expressed her delight in presenting the John Downton Awards on 21st November and said that quality of the work produced by young people from schools across the county was truly outstanding and inspiring. The exhibition was on display in the Stone Hall in Sessions House Maidstone.

7. Mr Jeffrey, Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services, provided an update on the following:

(a) The Winter Campaign had launched with e-newsletters due to go out on a fortnightly basis containing information and advice on how to stay healthy and warm, travel safely and how to get support with heating and food.

(b) Kent County Council held its Be a Councillor event, with 90 representatives in attendance from a number of political parties. The event focussed on the crucial role that Members play and utilised information that was readily available through the Local Government Association. Mr Jeffrey paid tribute to the team who coordinated the event and whose work was critical in making the event a success. The information from the event was also available as a webinar for future candidates and would be used to shape the Council's future induction programme for the new cohort of members from May 2025. The induction programme would provide a comprehensive overview of how the Council operates, the role of Members and how to be the most effective democratic body moving forward.

(c) On the issue of democracy and governance, the working party had met on a number of occasions over the past year and had, in the past week, culminated in a series of recommendations which would be presented to the Selection of Member Services Committee and County Council in December 2024. Mr Jeffrey thanked the political group leaders and all participants for their collaboration and openness to explore the Council's governance, which had resulted in suggestions for a better way of working.

(d) The deadline for Combined Member Grants had ended with 180 grant applications made within the past few months which would support 180 community groups and organisations. The Member Hub would be working hard to ensure all grants were in place before the end of the calendar year.

(e) Mr Jeffrey provided an update on the following engagement work:

- Proposed Changes to Wellbeing services in the Community consultation – closing date 27th January

- Modifications to the Kent Minerals and waste Local Plan consultation – closing date 28th November
 - Postural Stability Service consultation – Closing 17th December
 - In terms of engagement, a popular initiative had been the On-street electric vehicle (EV) charging points; since launched there had been 350 pins added to the map to allow residents to nominate their street or area for a public EV charging point.
 - Over 700 residents had also completed the survey which assessed their views and experience on current pharmacy services, which would help inform the development of the new Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. The consultation was due to close on 13th December.
 - Other engagement included the National Highways and Transport Survey, which was due to run until the end of February 2025.
 - The Family Hubs Awareness Survey was due to run until the end of March 2025
 - Making Space for Nature, which would inform the Council's Local Nature Recovery Plan was ongoing.
8. Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services provided an update on the following:
- (a) A statement was due to be released imminently during the House of Commons meeting (28th November) entitled 'Local Government Finance' and was anticipated to be the Policy statement in advance of the Local Government's provisional settlement which was due to be announced at the end of December 2024. Details would be shared in due course.
 - (b) Mr Oakford paid tribute to the Property team who had been set a £12m revenue target from the disposal of assets declared surplus for the Council, who were instead on target to achieve £22m. The sale of properties no longer used by the Council allowed reinvestment into the Council's capital programmes.
 - (c) Work was underway to upgrade Oracle, the Council's information technology platform. Mr Oakford thanked all those involved and recognised the additional work undertaken by staff to deliver the new system which would enable increased efficiency in the Council's financial reporting.
 - (d) Congratulations were also expressed to the Kent County Council Audit Team, who won the Excellence in Public Sector Audit Award at the Public Finance Awards Ceremony. Mr Oakford noted the tremendous work undertaken by all staff across the Council; however, he wished to pay tribute to those whom he worked closely with.

9. The Leader noted that since the last meeting of the Cabinet held in September, Kent County Council, along with Medway Council, had submitted an expression of interest in relation to the Government's devolution agenda. Whilst the approach to be adopted by Government remained unclear, the expression of interest was submitted along with a range of documents contributed by District and Borough councils, including a covering letter signed by 14 Leaders across Kent and Medway, and was both consistent and inclusive in its approach. The Leader thanked all those involved for their contributions.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

72. 24/00089 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - September 2024-25
(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 Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital budget monitoring position as at September 2024-25 (Quarter 2). The forecast revenue outturn position was an overspend of +£26.8m (excluding schools), which represented 1.9% of the revenue budget. The forecast outturn position had increased by £10.5m compared with the forecast position in June 2024-25 (Quarter 1). The largest overspend was within Adult Social Care & Health (+£32.5m), of which £22.7m related to savings which could not be delivered in year, but the majority of which would be delivered in future years. The remaining £9.8m of the overspend related to other service-related pressures, largely driven by the increase in the cost (both complexity and inflationary) to deliver social care placements from providers. Similar challenges were faced by other upper-tier local authorities with 81% reported to be on course to overspend on their adult social care budget in the current financial year. Work would continue within the ASCH directorate to reduce the forecast overspend as far as possible. Panels remained in place to ensure that social care need was being met in the most cost effective manner and this was reviewed by senior management. There were three particular workstreams in train with external consultants who were working closely with Adult Social Care and Health front line staff to identify more effective working to deliver cashable savings and reduce the forecast overspend trajectory for 2024-25. Non-delivery of savings would have a significant impact on the future year's budget. Any overspend was a concern for the authority and presented a risk for the Council's future financial sustainability. It was critical that the overspend for the Council was managed down to as near a balanced position as possible, as any overspend weakened the Council's financial sustainability going forward. Reserves were a one-off solution; however, they continued to be used without the ability to replenish them. The capital programme spent to date was £123.3m, representing 28.9 % of the total

approved budget. The directorates were projecting a £90m underspend against budget for the full year. This was split between a £14.4m real variance and £104m of rephasing. Of the rephasing, £41m was prudential borrowing funding, with the remainder funded from grant or external funding. Mr Oakford commented on those areas where there were underspends, primarily those reported within the Children, Young People & Education Department, and gave recognition to the work undertaken to not only reduce the spend but deliver savings.

2. The Leader noted the significant reduction in pressures compared to the financial position for 2023-2024 which was as a result of tremendous areas of progress, as evidenced within the SEND reforms. However, the savings which were due to be met within the Adult Social Care and Health remained a significant pressure for both Kent County Council and the sector as a whole and every effort would be made to help reduce those pressures. Difficult decisions would continue to be taken to contain budgetary tensions at a time when reserves were low and which also needed to be replenished.
3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - That until Government recognised the need for reform or structural change to address the financial pressures, the issues would continue.
 - Whilst there were many aspects not within the Local Authority's direct control, it was important to retain sight of those areas that were, with particular emphasis on SEND whereby an improved quality of service had been achieved through the Council's own initiatives, and savings had also been delivered. Thanks were offered to all staff involved in helping to deliver the SEND reforms as this ensured funding could be better utilised in the future for those who needed it most. The quality of service was dependent on the finance available in order to sustain it.
 - Tribute was paid to staff within the Children's, Young People and Education Directorate for the significant amount of work undertaken to deliver the projected savings and remain within budget. In particular, the high degree of support provided to families which in turn had helped to reduce the number of children in care, and thereby reduced budgetary pressures. However, an area which continued to create financial challenge was the residential and semi-independent placements for children. Whilst significant work had been done to ensure relevant contributions were received for the 18-25 cohort (which would positively impact on the Adults budget going forward), the cost of care for Looked After Children continued to rise despite all efforts to reduce this.
 - Work continued to reduce the pressure within the Adult Social Care Directorate. Of the £54m savings programme, £32m was projected to be met with £22m still outstanding. A majority of those savings were set

to be delivered in the 2025-26 financial budget. Reasons for delay included challenges attributed to partnership working and conflicting financial priorities

4. RESOLVED That Cabinet:

- (a) NOTE the forecast revenue overspend of £26.8m (excluding Schools) and the actions being taken to mitigate the forecast overspend
- (b) NOTE the forecast overspend on Schools' Delegated Budgets of £29.1m.
- (c) NOTE the forecast capital underspend of £90.1m.
- (d) NOTE the progress on the delivery of savings.
- (e) AGREE the Capital budget changes.
- (f) NOTE the Reserves, Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators monitoring

73. 24/00094 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Environment Plan
(Item 6)

Matthew Smyth (Director for Environment and Circular Economy) and Helen Shulver (Head of Environment) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Thomas (Cabinet Member for Environment) introduced the KCC Environment Plan which had been designed to unify and enhance the organisation's environmental and sustainability efforts. The plan was framed around six goals and aimed to support environmental, growth, and health outcomes without imposing additional financial burdens. The actions listed in the plan had corresponding target outcomes which would be reported on annually at the Environment and Transport Committee to ensure that progress was monitored and maintained. Mr Thomas noted that the plan had no end date as it was intended to be a live document and one which could be embedded across a number of areas within the Council. The Plan had been presented to the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee where the feedback received focussed on increased means of monitoring. Mr Thomas provided assurance that the team along with the Cross-Party Member Working Group would continue to explore and adopt improved monitoring systems.
2. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - The Environment Plan would require organisation wide support to ensure that the actions and activity were considered within all operations across the Council.
 - In regard to highways, it was noted that urban intensification had created the issue of waterways becoming polluted with sewage. This was largely due to outdated legislation which needed to be updated to take account of the changing environmental issues. It was therefore crucial that national policy continued to be lobbied and scrutinised to ensure that global matters were being addressed at a local level.

- The Environment Plan relied on the participation and cooperation of landowners. A significant amount of work had been done in recent years to strengthen the Council's connections with the rural communities, specifically in relation to environmental schemes and that work would continue. However, it was noted that the government's recent budget announcements regarding funding for landowners may impact participation levels going forward.

Members noted the environmental achievements in 2023-24 as outlined in the report and said that it provided credibility to the Council in its ability to demonstrate what has been done to date and what improvements were intended to be made going forward, specifically in relation to the work planned to be undertaken with communities and partners. Members noted the considerable achievement of Kent County Council as the third lowest County Council in England in terms of municipal waste sent to landfill; an accomplishment which evidenced the ambition and goals of the Council and provided communities in Kent with assurance that all efforts would continue to enhance environmental growth and sustainability.

- The Environment Plan would help to address the quality of seawater pollution which impacted enormously on the tourism sector and residents' ability to use local facilities.
3. Mr Thomas thanked Members for their comments and paid tribute to the team for all their work. Mr Thomas also provided members with an update on the work undertaken by the Council in building a dedicated team for its 'Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway' project which would work with partners and communities to develop a tailored nature recovery strategy for Kent and Medway. The team had been working closely with farmers as a crucial partner in the delivery of some of those projects and Mr Thomas provided assurance that all efforts would be maintained in both sustaining and building those relations
 4. RESOLVED that Cabinet endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Environment :
 - (a) To adopt the Kent Environment Plan on behalf of Kent County Council.
 - (b) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to refresh and/or make revisions to the Strategy as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.
 - (c) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

74. 24/00095 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028
(Item 7)

Matthew Smyth (Director for Environment and Circular Economy) and Helen Shulver (Head of Environment) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Thomas (Cabinet Member for Environment) introduced the report on the Climate Change Adaptation Plan which set out how Kent County Council would start to adapt its assets and services to climate change between 2025 and 2028. Findings from the Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment for Kent and Medway and activity and input from divisions across KCC had shaped the aim, objectives and actions that defined the Climate Change Adaptation Plan. Actions listed in the action plan had corresponding target outcomes which would be reported on annually at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee. As with the Environment Plan, the actions within the Climate Change Adaptation Plan would be delivered by base funded staff from services involved; however, match funding, or in-kind funding would be required to further progress outcomes.
2. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - Members welcomed that the Climate Change Adaptation Plan recognised the context of those issues which were presently impacting Kent's residents, including the closure of the Road of Remembrance caused through extensive embankment landslip. The Plan helped to build both the awareness and resilience required to help the Council in its future approaches.
 - It was noted that the Council had already had to make changes to its programme of work due to conditions brought about by climate change. For instance, in relation to highways, verges had caused increased issues due to wetter summers and mild winters. The use of technology and identifying trends was therefore key in helping to identify possible upcoming challenges caused through climate change
 - It was noted that a report was presented to Health Reform and Public Health on 19th November on the [Implications of Climate Change for Public Health](#). It focussed on climate as being one of the wider determinants of health impacting particularly on more deprived communities and groups. These changes were prevalent in Kent now and it was therefore crucial that Kent had a comprehensive adaptation strategy. The work was welcomed by Members.
3. RESOLVED that Cabinet endorse the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Environment :
 - (a) To ADOPT the Kent County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028.

- (b) To DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment to refresh and/or make revisions to the Strategy as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.
- (c) To DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

75. Financial Hardship Programme
(Item 8)

Lucy Alesbrook (Financial Hardship Programme Manager), Victoria Lawrence-Rose (Programme Officer, Financial Hardship Programme) and John Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance) were in attendance for this item.

1. The Leader introduced the report which provided a high-level overview of the support provided in response to the ongoing financial pressures, focussing in particular on the work being funded by the Helping Hands Scheme, and the delivery of the Department of Work and Pensions' Household Support Fund. The report also outlined the work delivered through these schemes to support the uptake of Pension Credit in the county. The Leader thanked the officers for their tremendous hard work which had enabled the programme to operate beyond its initial timeline, March 2025, but also the exceptional degree of work that had been undertaken in response to the government's announcements in relation to the Winter Fuel Payments and the work that had been done within this area to raise awareness and provide help to eligible residents.
2. Ms Alesbrook (*Financial Hardship Programme Manager*), and Ms Lawrence-Rose presented a series of slides which provided an update on the Financial Hardship Programme, including an overview of the Impact Report.
3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - Members paid tribute to the team for their outstanding work which supported residents in hardship, along with the excellent material provided as part of the report which brought case studies to life. It was essential that all efforts continued to ensure funding was received from Government to support the work being done as part of the Helping Hands Scheme. It was an incredible achievement to date.
 - Comments were made in regard to the government's decision to withdraw the winter fuel allowance which would have a detrimental impact on millions of pensioners. And whilst a considerable amount of promotional work had been undertaken to increase awareness and provide help to those who would be eligible for Pension Credit, there remained a large number of households which would potentially miss

out on receiving additional funding. The concern remained around those people who were not aware of their entitlement.

- Members commented on the collaborative effort of the scheme which also complemented the work undertaken within the voluntary sector.
 - In response to the allocation of the Household Support Fund, it was confirmed that early open discussions would be held with districts and boroughs as to the amount they receive. A decision would then be taken locally as to how the districts and boroughs provide funding to residents. Some would choose to provide funding directly to residents where details were known, others worked closely with the voluntary sector. There was a huge array of activity around the funding mechanisms used and Ms Alesbrook confirmed that a further report would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting with further detail.
4. The Leader noted the evolution of the Household Support Fund since its commencement and assurance was provided that funding would be used to both target and enhance the resilience and resources of Kent's residents. The Leader confirmed that the Financial Hardship programme would be brought back to Cabinet at a later date.
 5. RESOLVED that Cabinet note the report.