

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 14 November 2024.

PRESENT: Mr S Holden (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms M Dawkins, Mr M Dendor, Mr A R Hills, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr H Rayner, Mr D Robey and Mr A Sandhu, MBE

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R J Thomas, Mr N Baker and Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Ms H Chughtai (Director of Highways and Transportation), Mr P Lightowler (Head of Public Transport), Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst), Ms H Shulver (Head of Environment), Mrs E Milne (Flood Risk & Natural Environment Manager) and Mr S Pay (Transport Integration Manager)

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### **1. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

Apologies were received from Mr Bond. Mr Baldock was in attendance virtually.

##### **2. Declarations of Interest**

*(Item 3)*

No declarations of interest were received.

##### **3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024**

*(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

##### **4. Draft Budget**

*(Item 5)*

1) Mr Oakford introduced the budget report. The budget report was created before the announcement of the Government's funding allocation.

2) Mr Baker added the following comments regarding his portfolio:

- a) Subsidised bus services were included in the draft budget to ensure bus transportation was an option for residents and to help ensure children had transport to school.

- b) Continued efforts would be made to secure external grants and to increase income where appropriate and ringfence them for transport related projects.

3) Mr Thomas added the following comments regarding his portfolio:

- a) The previous savings target relating to the review of the number and operation of Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) sites, had been removed from the draft budget.
- b) Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- c) A budgetary safety net would be implemented to ensure bus services continued as KCC could not rely on money from the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).
- d) On-street parking was included in the budget because if the service was returned to KCC, 24 months' notice would be required. Discussions with district and borough councils would continue, but it was important to have the framework in place in the budget. Mr. Baker emphasised that financial and practical impacts needed consideration before any decisions could be made.
- e) There were no changes to subsidised bus routes proposed in the budget.
- f) In the long term, KCC's budget was not guaranteed. KCC was planning for the future based on current knowledge through the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). More information would be available after the spending review and grant distribution details were shared by the administration. However, bus subsidies would remain as budgeted through the MTFP period.

RESOLVED to NOTE the administration's draft revenue budgets including responses to consultation.

## **5. Verbal Updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director** *(Item 6)*

1) Mr Thomas provided an update on Waste and Recycling:

- a) Work continued in the area of creating energy from waste, as opposed to relying on landfill.
- b) Preparations were underway for the Government's waste reforms, which were developed as part of the UK's commitment to reducing waste and moving to a circular economy. The Authority strongly supported the principle of producer responsibility, believing it should be extended beyond just packaging waste to encompass additional materials. Residents were encouraged to recycle and reuse. Officers from the Resource Management and Circular Economy team, along with the FCC, presented a £2000 donation to the chairman's chosen charities, We are Beams and the Elliot Holmes Memorial Fund.
- c) Results from the HWRC Summer survey were shared. A total of 6,063 people participated about HWRCs booking system, and the feedback was overwhelmingly

positive. A 96% satisfaction rate was achieved, which were a testament to the Team's dedication and hard work.

d) The King's Hill Solar Farm Project, which achieved second place in the National Solar PV Project of the Year category at the National Energy Efficiency Awards 2024 held on 11th October, was highly commended for maximizing the site for biodiversity alongside the development of the solar farm, providing good outcomes for both nature and clean energy production.

e) The Whose Hoo project was a four-year landscape-scale project aimed at conserving, enjoying, and celebrating the remarkable landscape and heritage of the Hoo peninsula, and was set to receive almost £3 million of funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Through a diverse range of conservation, education, and volunteering activities, the project helped connect residents and visitors with the area while safeguarding its built and natural heritage. It was a collaborative project with partners, the total value of the Heritage activities that KCC contributed was £309,000, of which £228,000 was from the National Lottery Heritage Fund Grant, the remainder £78,000 of volunteer time, and a very small cash contribution of £2,000 from KCC to support the volunteer activity that was coordinated.

2) Mr Baker provided an update on Highways and Transport:

a) Keeping the highway safe was a key objective, and Highways Improvement teams, in collaboration with Kent Police, recently conducted eight days of site visits across the county to examine crash cluster sites. These visits enabled informed decisions on road improvements for some sites requiring limited intervention, and others needing engineering solutions. Feedback from Kent Police highlighted the expertise of the Highways Improvement teams in road design and safety.

b) Following the announcement of the unfunded transport projects review in July 2024 and the uncertainties that brought about, the Team were progressing cautiously with the A228 Blue Bell Hill improvement scheme. That project also needed to take into account a decision on the Lower Thames crossing, which had been due in October 2024. It was expected that the Spring Statement would report the results of the unfunded transport projects review with a decision on the Lower Thames crossing now due by the 25th May. The previous Government's Network North announcement, which would increase funding for the project from 85% to 100%, was expected to feature in phase two of the spending review in March 2025. Until this time, it was not known whether the scheme would be fully funded. KCC's Leader had expressed his disappointment at this delay, emphasising the need for the investment to relieve congestion at Dartford, provide network resilience, and unlock new opportunities for Kent and wider. The Council continued to work with National Highways where appropriate on the detailed design for the scheme so that delivery could commence on schedule once the decision was taken by the Government on its planning and funding.

c) Regarding Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5), the public consultation concluded on the 8th October. Engagement included public exhibitions, reports at Joint Transportation Boards and briefings offered to all district and borough councils. The feedback was being considered. The Member Task and Finish group was leading on the post-consultation changes before the plan went to full Council for adoption. It was crucial

to get the transport priorities right in the statutory plan, so that engagement could take place with the Government on funding and delivering essential schemes.

d) Regarding funding, the County Council had been awarded a grant of just over £12 million from the Department for Transport to increase the number of electric vehicle charging points in the county. The funding was awarded from the local electric vehicle infrastructure capital fund, the Levi Fund, which would support the delivery of thousands of charge points across England. This was discussed at Cabinet Committee before, and the funding would be used to roll out local charging infrastructure by providing an estimated 10,000 on-street EV charging bays across Kent during the next 10 years. The public charge points would help residents without access to off-street parking make the switch to EVs. Over the coming years, this would be a welcome boost for Kent residents, particularly as the government indicated plans to bring forward the ban on sales of new petrol and diesel cars to 2030. The Authority received 100% of the grant applied for, which was a testament to the hard work of the team. The delivery of the Levi program was set to begin in 2025. It would develop on the existing county charging point network, and work had already commenced with district, borough, and parish councils to produce more than 250 charge points in car parks across the county. A charge point operator partner would be appointed to install and operate networks for charge points. Residents would be asked to share their views on where they thought the charge points should be located, as it was essential to get the points where they would be used, both now and in the future.

e) The EU entry-exit system was postponed due to concerns raised by some EU member states, such as France, the Netherlands, and Germany, related to the lack of readiness of IT-based systems. A new date had not been provided.

f) Regarding the highway maintenance contract selection, the questionnaire had been issued on the 21st October, for return by the 25th November. The full commissioning documents would be released on the 9th December to the successful bidders. This was progressing at pace and on schedule. The new professional services framework contract commenced on 1st November. A conference had been held earlier in the week with the consultants to discuss working together effectively and delivering projects as effectively as possible. In introductory comments, the importance of public engagement was highlighted.

g) The pothole blitz program completed on 31<sup>st</sup> October. 5,501 potholes had been filled, and the patching totalled 229,622 square meters. The program rolled into the winter service, which started on the 18<sup>th</sup> October and would run through to the 18<sup>th</sup> April. There would be report a report to Cabinet Committee in February on the winter service performance.

h) The tender process for the mobility as a service platform was live, and the project was on target for the launch of the pilot in early 2025.

3) Officers responded to questions of detail and noted comments, which included the following:

a) Recognising the congestion at the Dartford Bridge, Mr. Baker said KCC was working with National Highways to ensure that if the Lower Thames Crossing was approved, work could start promptly. He stated that the moving traffic defences were

operational despite delays, and a report would be presented to the committee in the new year.

b) Regarding electric charging points, Mr. Baker mentioned that as demand increased, more solutions would be provided, likely using a mix of government grant and commercial funding.

c) It was important to improve recycling rates and manage waste in a more sustainable way. Controlling contaminated waste would have a major benefit.

4) Mr Jones provided an update on Environment and Transport:

a) The Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee conference was held on the 8th and 9th October. This remained the leading event in the local authority waste and recycling calendar, and this year, KCC led a session on optimising the design of household waste recycling centres. The Resource Management and Circular Economy Operations Manager and a Manager from FCC had presented them item, drawing on KCC's award-winning site in Arlington. With active travel, the team had hosted a second member and officer workshop to explore opportunities for walking, wheeling, and cycling improvements. Sustrans facilitated the workshop, which was well attended by county, district, and borough members. The team was collaborating closely with members to deliver the best and most appropriate outcomes, which would stand them in good stead for any future Active Travel England funding that might come their way.

b) Regarding parish seminars, they had taken place virtually with an in-person meeting scheduled for late January. All were well attended, featured excellent and varied presentations, and received positive feedback.

c) Ms Jacqui Lalley, KCC's Kent Driver Education Team Leader, had been recognised for her role in the team that led the way in developing national best practice. Ms Lalley voluntarily served on the management team of the National Association of Driver Intervention Providers. The aim of the Association was to achieve best practice and effectiveness in setting up and running driver intervention schemes for all categories of offense. In 2024, the Road Offender Education Organisation, which operated, managed, administered, and developed the National Driving Offender Retraining Scheme, recognised the work of the management team and presented them with an award for outstanding team contribution to the endorsed scheme. Mr Jones went on to recognise the performance of all teams, which remained high and demonstrated dedication to addressing resident issues and concerns. He wished to formally record his thanks for all their efforts, congratulate them, and hope they could keep up the good work.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.

## **6. Performance Dashboard**

*(Item 7)*

*Matt Wagner, Chief Analyst and Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport were in attendance for this item*

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report. There were 17 key performance indicators (KPIs); 13 were rated green, 4 were rated amber and 0 were rated red.

2) Officers responded to questions of detail and noted comments, which included the following:

- a) It was suggested that the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) rising waste tonnage , could be influenced by the challenges that collection authorities have been having. If food waste could be separated from the rest of household waste, significant savings could be made. It was the mix of waste received in the centres that made the difference, particularly the inert building materials. Also, problems with new waste collection suppliers had caused an increase of people using HWRCs.
- b) In response to a question regarding how people were being incentivised to recycle, it was explained that there had been a trial in Dover which had resulted in a 10% increase in the food collection rate. KCC were working to collaborate with other authorities and find the best system to improve overall practice. Simpler recycling was a new government requirement to which authorities needed to conform. Extended producer responsibility payments were to be introduced.

RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard.

**7. 24/00095 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028**  
(Item 8)

1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.

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

a) Members were assured that the map of how KCC was achieving Net Zero would be presented to the committee in January. However, the costs and impacts were not part of the Adaptation Plan.

b) KCC worked with its partners to support the environment plan and regular updates would be provided to Members.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision for the Cabinet Member for Environment to:

i) To ADOPT the Kent County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028.

ii) 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.

iii) To DELEGATE authority to the Corporate 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.

## **8. 24/00094 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Environment Plan**

*(Item 9)*

*Helen Shulver, Head of Environment was in attendance for this item*

1) Mr Thomas presented the report.

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

a) Regular updates on the plan would be brought to the committee. The Kent Environment Strategy Cross Party Members Group was used to test ideas, and Members could bring questions there for more detail.

b) Regarding match funding, Mr. Thomas noted the limited capital available. KCC was developing a Green Finance Strategy to support ongoing work, alongside funding through Council Tax and seeking sustainable, ethical investment.

c) KCC was making efforts to support green highways, including efficient supply chain management, influencing road users to make sustainable choices, and innovating new products and materials to reduce pollutants from highways.

d) Mr. Thomas agreed on the importance of partnership working, highlighting the framework for goals and strategies on page 24 of the plan. Ms Shulver added that more in-depth reports would be available to Members, and Officers were willing to share detailed information.

e) Mr. Thomas stated the aim was to have a cross-departmental support team rather than just a delivery team. He cited the example of carbon emissions from the KCC building, overseen by the director for infrastructure, with officers working alongside the director. More information would be in the report for the January meeting.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member for Environment to:

- I. To adopt the Kent Environment Plan on behalf of Kent County Council.
- II. 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.
- III. To delegate authority to the Corporate 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.

## **9. Update on Kent's Plan Bee**

*(Item 10)*

- 1) Mr Thomas presented the report.
- 2) Further to questions and comments from members, it was noted that:
  - a) Members were able to pledge their districts' participation in the scheme through the No Mow May website. The report included top performing districts but figures from all participating districts could be shared with members.
  - b) Mr. Thomas highlighted the Making Space for Nature strategy, which was being developed and would be presented to the committee in January. KCC was required to participate in this strategy along with 48 areas across the country, aiming to reverse decades of nature decline by prioritising species and habitats and mapping out the process.
  - c) In response to a discussion on signage for unmown areas, Mr. Thomas suggested that signs might be problematic for other departments but invited members to work towards having signage in their divisions.
  - d) Mr. Baker commented that the reporting system for informing Highways about verges needing to be left unmown, needed improvement. He added that the alternatives to current weed-killing chemicals were ineffective, leaving both those wanting weeds gone and those opposing chemical use unhappy. He suggested closer collaboration between Highways and the Environment Department to address this and other issues.

RESOLVED to note the report.

## **10. Better Buses Bill - Bus Franchising**

*(Item 11)*

*Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport was in virtual attendance for this item*

- 1) Mr Baker introduced the report. Mr Lightowler presented the report virtually.
- 2) Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - a) This had not become law, and details were still unclear. A major question was about funding. It was agreed that a broader vision was needed beyond just buses, emphasising the importance of reliability and giving school children positive experiences on buses.
  - b) The issue tied into a wider devolution debate, questioning whether transport for Kent could work as a separate agency, similar to Kent Fire Authority, rather than being part of the council.
  - c) With ringfenced funding, planning ahead would be easier, routes could be established, and infrastructure for buses would be in place.
  - d) There was a disparity between public perception of KCC's responsibilities and those of bus companies.



- e) Mr. Baker concluded by agreeing that conversations should continue, following the process through parliament, and seeing what funding KCC received at the end.
- f) Mr. Lightowler added that franchising might offer opportunities to work with other authorities and give KCC better control, but funding remained an issue.
- g) A Member suggested that the Committee recommend further exploration of the franchise model to the cabinet and officers, which was agreed.

RESOLVED to note the report.

## **11. Road Closures- Update Report**

*(Item 12)*

*Pauline Harmer, Senior Highways Manager was in attendance for this item*

- 1) Mr Baker introduced the report, supported by Ms Harmer.
- 2) Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
  - a) KCC was restricted by law regarding road sign content. The name of the company carrying out the utility works would be in bold, with any supporting names also featured.
  - b) In regard to road sign clarity, directing Members to the One Network website for information on permits and road closures. He noted the balance between informing road users and avoiding sign clutter.
  - c) The Kent Corridor Coordination Group's efforts to coordinate road works, though emergency works often disrupted plans and road users' journeys.

RESOLVED to note the update.

## **12. Work Programme**

*(Item 13)*

The work programme was noted.