

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 22 January 2026.

PRESENT: Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair), Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair), Mr C Burwash (Substitute for Mr J Defriend), Mr W Chapman, Mr J Eustace, Mr A J Hook, Mr M A J Hood, Mrs S Hudson, Mr T Mole, Mr T L Shonk, Dr G Sturley, Mr P Thomas, Mr D Truder and Mr M Reidy

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins, Mr S Dixon, Mrs B Fordham, Mr P King, Miss D Morton, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Ms C Russell, Mr P Webb and Mr D Wimble

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer), Mr C Chapman (Assistant Director - Fair Access and (Interim) SEN Processes), Ms S Dann (Interim Assistant Director of Quality Assurance), Ms A Gleave (Interim Assistant Director for SEND Operations), Mrs S Hammond (Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health), Mr A Jeffery (Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Ms C McInnes (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mr M Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny)) and Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive)

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **28. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item A1)*

Apologies were received from Ms Ainslie- Malik and Mr Defriend, for whom Mr Burwash was substituting.

#### **29. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting**

*(Item A2)*

1. The Chairman declared, in relation to item C1, that his wife was a Director of Education in a secondary special educational needs provision, that his two children had gone through the system, and that he was previously a trustee of an independent special school.
2. Mr Alister Brady declared in reference to item C1 that his partner was the director of the Tizard Centre, a group that specialised in autism and learning difficulties.

#### **30. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025**

*(Item A3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 25 November 2025 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chairman.

### **31. SEND Scrutiny - Education Health and Care Plans (deferred from 25 November 2025)**

*(Item C1)*

1. The item was introduced by Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, who outlined the report's focus on why Kent was an outlier nationally in relation to higher numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). She highlighted limitations in available data, the lack of standardised targets or comparable datasets and the wider national increase in EHCPs as potential constraints of the report's analysis and summarised their approach in relation to national research.
2. Mrs Christine McInnes, Interim Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, emphasised the significance of Appendix 2 of the report that addressed national challenges with the identification and use of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) data. She also outlined updates within the SEND sector in relation to wider ongoing policy changes.
3. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:
  - a) Further research to identify the relevant factors and gaps regarding numbers of EHCPs would require additional resourcing and could face challenges in drawing firm conclusions and improving service delivery due to the breadth of existing evidence.
  - b) Craig Chapman, Assistant Director - Fair Access and (Interim) SEN Processes, acknowledged that the paper reflected a long- standing history of work on SEND and assured the Committee of the depth of knowledge and focussed activity taking place to deliver significantly improved service delivery compared to previous years. He highlighted that the challenges discussed arose from wider educational and demographic factors beyond the local authority SEND service and that the paper aimed to explain why, despite these national issues Kent's local context has resulted in different outcomes. He emphasised that while these historic factors continued to be monitored, the priority was addressing current need and meeting statutory duties.
  - c) Mrs McInnes outlined recent practice in Kent regarding neurodiversity, including the purchase of an Autism Education Trust licence. She explained that Kent had brought together the "This is Me" programme and the Department for Education (DfE)- funded Promoting Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) initiative. This enabled a combined approach that targeted organisations including staff training and also supported early identification and prevention within families. She added that this included specific work with young girls, which could be shared upon request.
  - d) Alice Gleave, Assistant Director for SEN Statutory Service, recognised the national challenge of identifying autism within young girls due to "masking" that potentially presented more subtly than outwardly dysregulated behaviour. She

also confirmed a renewed systemic focus on recognising “masking” behaviours in girls, reflected in a significant increase in the number receiving a diagnosis.

- e) Mr Chapman explained that EHCP data on neighbouring Local Authorities (LAs) in the paper were included as part of a routine comparative analysis for the Committee to consider. However, he established that due to a range of unknown factors, it would be difficult to determine whether any correlation existed between the number of grammar schools and the number of EHCPs across these authorities.
- f) The Specialist Teaching and Learning Service provided a statutory service supporting children and young people with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and physical disabilities. Mrs McInnes explained that a non-statutory service, delivered through 12 specialist schools, had recently been brought inhouse in order to ensure a consistent service was offered across Kent.
- g) Mr Chapman acknowledged the growing national discussion regarding the consumption of ultra- processed foods and the potential links with increased numbers of EHCPs. However, as the availability of food products in Kent did not significantly differ from other areas, this was unlikely to be the cause of a localised increase in EHCPs.
- h) Kent continued to have a higher number of out-of- county school placements, partly due to previous regulations financially incentivising other LAs to place children in Kent without contributing to the associated costs. Following significant lobbying from KCC, DfE guidance had changed and this would be reflected in the Council’s savings proposals. Mr Chapman stressed Kent could not control numbers of pupils from other LAs placed in its schools, and while it affected available capacity, the report related specifically to Kent pupils and decisions made for them.
- i) There was ongoing national research into the relationship between socio-economic factors and numbers of EHCPs, with families in lower socio-economic groups being less likely to obtain an EHCP, whilst potentially being more likely to have special needs requirements. It was stressed that rising EHCP numbers was complex, with needs varying widely and national definitions remaining unclear. Mr Chapman also confirmed that the data was focussed on children that had a postcode in Kent.
- j) Mrs McInnes explained that the reference to “gap narrowing” in the report related to a change in Kent’s trajectory for agreeing and issuing EHCPs. Whilst numbers continued to increase, the rate of growth had slowed since 2022 compared with the steep rise between 2018 and 2022, reflecting changes in SEND management and the assessment processes. These changes included reviewing the thresholds for ECHP decision- making, intensive staff training, a consistent, graduated approach and referring complex cases to a newly introduced panel process. The financial impact of these changes were minimal, as they had been delivered primarily through existing staff and part- time secondee leaders.

- k) The term “toxic environmental influences” in the report referred to factors such as emissions, pesticides, and screen time, for which research on a national level was taking place.
- l) Mrs McInnes explained that various parenting practices had been identified as a contributing factor for higher demand for EHCPs. She referenced the age at which children are weaned, due to the effect on oral muscle development which could affect speech, language and eating skills. It was also highlighted that an increasing number of children were starting school wearing nappies. Public Health had worked with health visitors and family hubs to develop comprehensive parenting support through family hubs, training sessions, support groups and online resources.
- m) A Member raised the concern that the reporting could imply financial incentives were driving some parents to seek an EHCP, referencing the lack of evidence for this in Kent and the citation in the report to a newspaper article. Mrs McInnes clarified that the purpose of the report was to present the data and to highlight that Kent’s position differed significantly from national trends. Therefore, she advised that including certain information was relevant in order to raise important considerations for the Committee. Mr Chapman explained that the inclusion of the article was to provide context within a broad, impartial discussion about potential pressures on the system, not in order to express an opinion.
- n) Mrs McInnes explained that Kent had historically taken a different approach towards SEND, with a focus on placing children with special educational needs into special schools rather than mainstream schools and this was reflected in the data and KCC’s current position. She also highlighted that mainstream schools had been on a journey to become more inclusive, in line with longstanding statutory requirements and that Ofsted had improved their inspection of SEND inclusion.
- o) Mrs McInnes confirmed that Kent had the highest proportion of selective schools in the country, with approximately a third of its secondary schools being selective schools. Despite extensive work with selective schools, as children with SEND were less likely to access selective schooling, non-selective schools had taken a disproportionately high number of pupils with EHCPs.
- p) Mrs Gleave outlined the structure and processes of the panel system, including how information and reports were compiled, how panels interrogated that information, the code in which they were bound by and how the panel determined whether to assess and issue an EHCP in order to support a child’s progress. Improvements were focussed on strengthening the quality of decision- making and ensuring a clearer understanding of the professional reports. Extensive training had also been provided to officers and social workers to assist in their understanding of the information required in reports to support effective decisions. Mrs Gleave asserted that Kent’s panels may not necessarily act differently to other LA’s, but their judgement was dependent on the levels of training and expertise. They were also monitored by the DfE in relation to decision- making, timelines and quality assurance with other LAs.

- q) Mrs Fordham explained that as the system transitioned away from the assumption that children with special educational needs were best placed predominantly in special schools, mainstream schools were in the process of addressing ongoing issues and ensuring that these children's needs could be met in mainstream settings. The Committee was assured that there would be further reporting concerning this topic.
  - r) It was highlighted that Covid-19 had disproportionately affected children from lower socio- economic backgrounds, who had missed early socialisation opportunities and were now demonstrating related developmental impacts in schools. SEND services were working closely with Children's services and family hubs to provide targeted training, outreach and support. Furthermore, the uptake of government- funded childcare was being monitored with relevant action being taken in areas of low participation. The Committee was also reminded of both the relevant Short- Focussed Inquiry (SFI) and other early- years initiatives operating, including free SEND training through Dingley's Promise and the Balance speech and language programme.
  - s) In response to a Member's concerns about whether funding arrangements for primary schools might contribute to increased EHCP requests, Mrs McInnes agreed to provide supplemental information in a future report and emphasised that solutions involved not only additional funding but broader use of existing resources. She stressed that some of these challenges were mitigated through collaborative working within communities of schools, enabling shared use of resources. Furthermore, schools also had access, at no cost, to multi- agency Professional Resource Groups, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.
4. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:
- a) A Member observed that the reasons for Kent's higher numbers of EHCPs remained unclear with several possible contributing factors but no certainty on their relative impact. The Member acknowledged the resource constraints, but suggested further research and potential collaboration with other LAs to jointly fund future work could provide meaningful insight and support long- term improvements.
  - b) A Member commented on the wide range of factors that contributed to children's additional needs, including early years development, parental support, environmental influences such as overstimulation and increased screen usage, and the ongoing social impact of Covid- 19. They emphasised the importance of supporting parents as well as children, exploring preventative approaches and strengthening the role of family hubs in engaging families and providing scalable early support, encouraging Members to visit their local hubs.
  - c) Concerns were raised regarding securing investment for SEND, considering funding cutbacks from Central Government.
  - d) A Member stressed the need for a light- touch and timely approach to current pressures, raising concerns about delays in progressing EHCP cases. The

Member supported detailed investigations for future scrutiny yet highlighted that some evidence may take years to develop and therefore suggested involving knowledgeable experts to help accelerate work.

- e) A Member challenged the premise that increased EHCP numbers in Kent were linked to financial incentives for parents and encouraged the Committee to provide clarification on their views on such matters. Instead, the Member suggested that previous decisions to under- invest in mainstream provision, alongside investment in special schools may have contributed to parents of children with complex needs feeling inadequately supported and subsequently believing that they required an EHCP or other specialist provision. The Member welcomed the renewed focus on inclusion and investment in mainstream settings and supported reviewing the pace of change to ensure that children's needs are appropriately met.
  - f) A Member reflected on the Council's previous focus on special schools, acknowledging that some mainstream schools had struggled to provide a suitable environment for pupils that had the capacity to have their needs met in a mainstream setting. The Member requested data showing numbers of pupils with EHCPs across different secondary settings, including grammar schools.
  - g) A Member highlighted the deterrents for parents with children with complex needs to send their children to special schools. They also suggested that families experiencing significant financial pressures may be more inclined to explore alternative routes for support, including through the EHCP process.
  - h) It was argued that current funding restrictions limited the ability to provide a full range of educational pathways, making it harder to match provision to pupil need. They suggested that the scale of demand, combined with insufficient grant funding to expand or develop schools early enough was contributing to Kent's position as an outlier.
  - i) A Member concluded by arguing that obtaining an EHCP was not necessarily the sole route to receiving support within a mainstream school setting.
5. The Chairman called on the Cabinet Member to provide comments and clarifications on the Member's points of debates:
- a) Mrs Fordham stressed that EHCPs should be viewed within the wider SEND system and that support should be focussed on understanding and meeting a child's needs at every stage of development. She stressed that budget pressures required a gradual shift of funding away from high- cost independent placements towards early intervention and strengthened mainstream provision.
6. The Chairman summarised the discussion, beginning by recognising that KCC remained under an improvement notice, which reinforced the need to deliver effective SEND support whilst also understanding the causes behind current challenges. He also reflected on parental experiences of seeking support, acknowledging the ongoing work and further progress requires to ensure needs were met. The Chairman also highlighted the importance of understanding the

relationship between social deprivation, SEND and access to EHCPs, including the potential barriers that families may face in securing support. Finally, he referenced that there was no national findings of fraud relating to Personal Independent Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA), emphasising the importance to rely on clear evidence rather than anecdotal reporting. The Chairman proposed to note the report and this was agreed by the Committee.

7. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

### **32. Short Focused Inquiry - Water Quality and Supply** *(Item D1)*

Ms Claudine Russell was present for this item.

1. The report was introduced by Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure, who outlined the establishment of the Short- Focussed Inquiry (SFI) on Water Supply and Quality. She also advised that the scope be broadened beyond Southeast (SE) Water to cover the whole of Kent, ensuring that the SFI covered all water-related incidents that had recently taken place. Mrs Spore also highlighted the ongoing work by other organisations in respect of the water quality/ outages in Kent which would need to be considered as part of the SFI. This included the Kent & Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF), Ofwat and the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) as well as additional funding which had been secured in the Growth, Environment and Transport (GET) directorate to support work regarding water resources.
2. In response the report, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee which covered the following:
  - a) A Member argued since the full Council meeting, it had become clear the water supply issues extended beyond the expected scope of the SFI, with many communities served by SE Water experiencing water outages. They also recognised the serious challenges about sustainability of water supplies and the reliability of SE Water and other providers. It was also stressed that the SFI should address how water companies work with the KMRF and local councils due to existing water outage protocols failing to activate during recent incidents.
  - b) Ms Claudine Russell requested that the SFI consider the specific needs of livestock farmers due to many being left without water, dedicated support or reporting routes from providers. It was also suggested that the SFI examine differing impacts on urban and rural communities, including access to emergency water stations and reliable transport links. She further highlighted concerns about communication during outages, including clarity of responsibilities and timeliness of information. Committee Members expressed support for these proposals being incorporated into the SFI.
  - c) A Member requested the SFI examine the security and long- term resilience of the water supply, citing underlying issues that had gone unresolved. The Member also stressed ongoing concerns about emergency water provision during outages.

- d) In response to a question surrounding governance, it was confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee held the responsibility of establishing and setting the scope for the SFI, rather than Full Council.
  - e) It was confirmed that the SFI would exist separately to the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee and that the intention of the SFI was to establish the role Kent could play in ensuring water supply to residents.
3. The Chairman proposed the Scrutiny Committee agree:
    - a. To establish a Short- Focussed Inquiry into the Failure in Water Supply in Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas and subsequent supply interruptions in early January 2026.
    - b. To delegate to Officers, in conjunction with members of the SFI group, the arrangement of the Inquiry as outlined in the report.
  4. The Chairman further proposed the Committee take into consideration the advice provided by Mrs Spore and Ms Russell in relation to setting of the parameters of the SFI and acknowledge that the SFI would report back to the Scrutiny Committee in May 2026. This was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee.
  5. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee agree:
    - a. To establish a Short- Focussed Inquiry into the Failure in Water Supply in Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas and subsequent supply interruptions in early January 2026.
    - b. To delegate to Officers, in conjunction with members of the SFI group, the arrangement of the Inquiry as outlined in the report.
    - c. To take into consideration the advice provided by Mrs Spore and Ms Russell in relation to setting the parameters of the SFI and acknowledge that the SFI would report back to the Scrutiny Committee in May 2026.

**33. Draft Revenue Budget 2026-27, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026-29, Draft Capital Programme 2026-2036, and draft Treasury Management Strategy**  
(Item D2)

1. The item was introduced by Brian Collins, Deputy Leader, who thanked the relevant officers for their time and work in the production of the Draft Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
2. Further to comments and questions from Members, discussion covered the following:
  - a) Mr Collins assured the Committee that the MTFP demonstrated the savings/income necessary to balance the later years of the plan assuming no further council tax increases.

- b) Dave Shipton, Head of Finance, Policy, Planning and Strategy, clarified that the £250k saving listed for the library estate review formed part of the long-standing community assets programme, with any savings only arising from temporary closures pending a revised library strategy. A Member proposed the recommendation that the wording relating to the review of the library estate be amended to clarify its reference to temporary closures only. It was agreed that it would be considered outside of the Committee and brought back if necessary.
- c) Paul King, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects, clarified that a proposed £130k saving from removing blue badge parking concessions at country parks had already been achieved without removing the concessions. Accessibility remained a priority, including through initiatives such as Changing Spaces.
- d) In response a query on the £333k change for the Crisis and Resilience Fund, Mr Shipton explained it was a technical adjustment to reflect the reduced spending capacity following the external funding allocation in the provisional settlement, with a full reconciliation to be provided outside of the meeting.
- e) A concern was raised about the flat cash settlement for the Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant, with regards to it representing a real-terms reduction due to inflation. Mr Collins confirmed that this was a draft budget, and that the issue would be considered before the final proposal. Mr Shipton further added that the grant was subject to the multi- year government settlement with no uplift over the period.
- f) Mr Collins confirmed that following extensive debate and consultation, the administration had been able to reduce the planned Council tax increase by 20%, contrary to previous years' practice. He also established that the main areas of financial risk continued to be Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Services, although the recent Quarter 3 report indicated the position in ASC was gradually improving.
- g) In response to concerns about significant medium- term budget shortfalls and the achievability of several savings proposals, Mr Collins explained that the medium- term forecasts were subject to adjustment and that focus was on the upcoming financial year. Mr Shipton confirmed that the MTFP had not always been balanced and highlighted that previous plans had assumed the maximum Council tax increase. He further clarified that the Section 25 report would outline the most significant short and medium- term risks within the budget and MTFP, allowing for a transparent assessment of such risks to take place.
- h) Regarding questions on speculative savings proposals, Mr Collins emphasised the ambitious nature of the savings plans and that they were still in draft stage. Mr Shipton also explained that District Councils needed to submit their final tax base estimates, including assumed collection rates, by 31 January 2026, followed by statutory returns to Central Government once Council tax was set. A full breakdown of tax base assumptions would be available in March or April, with interim information provided earlier through statutory returns.

- i) Mr Collins confirmed that work to assess compound risks arising from multiple risks occurring simultaneously had been ongoing and would be addressed before the budget was presented at Full Council. He also assured the Committee that the fresh perspective of a new administration instilled confidence that the financial pressures in the ASC sector could be reduced.
- j) Regarding the Safety Valve Agreement, Mr Shipton explained that there was a statutory override preventing the accumulated High Needs Block deficit from affecting the Council's General Fund that was in place until March 2028 but could be removed by Central Government at any time. He also acknowledged that its removal without any additional government support posed a significant medium- term risk to KCC's future financial sustainability.
- k) In response to concerns about the risks of freezing residential and nursing care fee uplifts, Mr Collins acknowledged the risks during ongoing negotiations but stated that the approach formed part of the administration's wider strategy to deliver efficiencies while maintaining ASC duties. Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health, explained that around one- third of the Kent care market was funded by KCC, with the remainder funded by the NHS or other authorities and that recent above- inflation increases had already been applied in previous years. She also highlighted that the joint brokerage team had transferred back to KCC on 1 December 2025, improving joint decision- making with the NHS and enabling better value placements, with further discussions with NHS colleagues ongoing.
- l) Mr Collins confirmed that the late Fair Funding Settlement had made financial forecasting more challenging and placed additional pressure on officers.
- m) Christine McInnes, Interim Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, confirmed that a small number of children with highly complex needs were in very high- cost external placements, and that new in- county provision was being developed to bring up to 4 children back in Kent by September 2026, which would reduce costs and improve oversight. She also explained that savings in Children's Services would be achieved with joint work with Adult Services on health contributions and modernising manual processes, including automating parts of the SEND assessment processes and payments to early years providers.
- n) Mr Collins stated that projected savings across all Directorates would be closely monitored and highlighted a £670k annual net reduction in interest costs achieved through early debt repayment.
- o) Mr Shipton detailed that £16 million had been identified as no longer required following an annual review of reserves, with £7 million originally set aside for social care charging reforms that was no longer proceeding and £9 million for major projects which was now funded through the Strategic Reset Programme.
- p) Mr Collins stated that capital receipts were being used to support the current year's overspend and that further use of capital receipts may be considered if prudent as the year progressed. Mr Shipton explained that £8 million of capital receipts were already assumed to be used in the 2025-26 budget and a further

£7 million would be used to support the current year's overspend, totalling £15 million. An additional £9 million was planned for use in 2026-27 and any further information on the available capital receipts in the pipeline would need to be provided by Infrastructure.

- q) Mr Shipton explained that the £5.8 million reduction in capital spending reflected the removal of the digital autopsy and public mortuary project, as the software required for the scheme had been found to be unsuitable and the project could not proceed. It was also indicated that the £500k reversal relating to temporary spending to mobilise new contracts for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC), carried no identified risk or impact anticipated from removing the spend.
- r) Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, outlined that mediation with the NHS regarding Section 117 aftercare funding had progressed with an in- principal agreement for a 50/50 funding split pending Integrated Care Board (ICB) confirmation.
- s) Mr Shipton advised that the £37.7 million figure in the report represented the total forecasted spend over a 10- year period required for the modernisation of assets under the Council's policy of keeping buildings warm, safe and dry. Mr Shipton stressed to the Committee that due to funding limitations, some non-priority buildings that do not meet those standards may be subject to temporary closure.
- t) It was advised that Council taxbase data provided by District Councils would have figures confirmed in March. Mr Collins elaborated that KCC's forecasts for these figures relied on well- established estimations by the Finance department. Further information could be provided outside of Committee. Mr Collins also explained that progress against the financial plans were monitored through the quarterly reports, which provided early indicators of whether the Council was on target.
- u) Mr Shipton highlighted that the 2026-29 plans had been prepared on the basis that the Council would continue in its current form, as no firm decisions on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had been made. Mr Shipton advised that no specific reserve had been set aside at this stage, as implementation costs would depend on the model that was chosen, each with different payback periods and therefore this would be established once a model was confirmed. Any pre-implementation costs incurred by the Council would have to be funded by borrowing from long-term reserves which would have to be paid back from LGR savings over the payback period. Mr Collins further confirmed that no allowances or reserves had been made in the 2025/26 budget for potential LGR implementation costs.
- v) In response to a query on the £8 million referenced in the budget regarding Oracle cost, Mr Shipton clarified it was only part of the total, funded through capital receipt flexibility in order to avoid drawing from the IT reserve for one year and creating a one- off saving. The overall annual cost of approximately £20-30 million had been largely already covered by the existing IT reserve.

- w) Regarding the use of capital receipts, Mr Collins assured the Committee that plans would be included in next year's budget to replenish relevant reserves and that ongoing property disposals, undertaken in line with Section 123 duties, were continuing to generate capital receipts.
  - x) Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport, advised that the winter maintenance budget would remain at the current level, with funding incorporated within the wider highways maintenance contract. Any inflationary impacts would be reflected through the updated contract rates already accounted for within the budget. Mr Jones confirmed that wider asset management approach, covering both revenue and capital, could be provided to Members outside of Committee. Mr Shipton added that the papers published showed the planned year-on-year changes in revenue spending, not the full-service budgets, which would be produced as part of the final draft budget.
  - y) A Member referenced the multi- year settlement and asked what level of Government funding would have been required to enable a 0% Council tax increase, as well as breakdowns for the current year and next 2 years. Mr Collins stated the figures were not available but could be provided outside of the meeting.
  - z) A Member raised concerns about the reliance on property disposals to balance the budget, the long-term impact on services, and the number of assets remaining for future sale. In response, Mr Collins reiterated that the Council had a statutory duty under Section 123 of the Local Government Act to dispose of any property no longer required for use, following an assessment by the relevant service and local members. Mr Collins also acknowledged Member's concerns about underfunding in building maintenance leading to increased disposals and an overreliance on capital receipts and assured Members property and maintenance matters were kept under regular review with Infrastructure colleagues.
  - aa) Miss Morton outlined how the Council maintained a strong relationship with healthcare service providers, meeting regularly with the Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KICA), and confirmed that the charging policy remained under consultation, with ongoing engagement and a further meeting scheduled shortly. It was posed that once these negotiations concluded that the results be brought back in time for the final budget or to the Adult Social Care & Public Health Cabinet Committee.
  - bb) Mr Shipton advised that demand and cost pressures had been rising faster than available funding since 2021/22, increasing financial risks. He stated that without sufficient funding to meet statutory duties, these pressures would grow and create increasing challenges.
3. Ben Watts, Deputy Chief Executive, stressed the importance of Members fully understanding the budget- setting process and encouraged Councillors to attend available finance training sessions and make use of Member resources. Mr Watts explained that additional information would be published in the coming weeks and Members were also encouraged to seek support from Democratic Services or Finance where needed.

4. The Chairman proposed the Scrutiny Committee note the administration's draft capital and revenue budget proposals and outlined the Committee's requests for further information on the following: risk and compound risk, the total number of properties available, budgeting for LGR, capital receipts in year, greater clarity on the Oracle programme, Highways Asset Winter Repair Maintenance as part of the entire Highways Asset Maintenance budget and what the Central Government grant would have needed to be to enable a 0% Council Tax increase. This was agreed by the Committee.
5. RESOLVED that the Committee note the administration's draft revenue budget proposals and request further information on the following: risk and compound risk, the total number of properties available, budgeting for LGR, capital receipts in year, greater clarity on the oracle programme, Highways Asset Winter Repair Maintenance as part of the entire Highways Asset Maintenance budget and what the Central Government grant would have needed to be to enable a 0% Council Tax increase.

**34. Work Programme**  
*(Item E1)*

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.