

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 13 May 2026.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins, Mr J Henderson, Miss D Morton, Mr J Moreland and Ms C Russell

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms R Anderson (Head of Business Information, Strategy and Assurance), Miss M Bundy (Democratic Services Officer), Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), 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), Mr M Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny)) and Mr M Thomas-Sam (Director of Operations (Short Term Support))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

45. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A1)

Apologies were received from Dr Sturley, for whom Mrs Lawes was substituting and the Church and Parent Governor representatives.

Mr Moreland was present virtually.

46. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A2)

There were no declarations of interest.

47. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March and 1 April 2026

(Item A3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 3 March and 1 April 2026 were a correct record and they be signed by the Chairman.

48. KCC Preparedness for Winter

(Item B1)

1. The item was introduced by Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, who highlighted the importance of scrutinising winter preparedness and

system reliance across health and social care. She also relayed encouraging progress in reducing corridor care through collaborative working across partners and thanked Adult Social Care staff for their contributions to improvements.

2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:
 - a) Members praised the report for its level of detail and clarity and expressed their appreciation to officers for their work in its preparation.
 - b) Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health, advised that staff vacancies were being addressed through national and local recruitment initiatives, and that approval had been given to recruit to all identified frontline roles; however, attracting sufficient applicants remained the key challenge. Michael Thomas- Sam, Director of Operations (Short- Term Support), added that the strategy intended to focus on staff retention, support and career development, alongside recruitment. The importance of the enablement function in managing demand, particularly during winter, was emphasised, and vacancy rates across the sector continued to be monitored.
 - c) Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health, acknowledged that flu vaccination uptake in schools remained low, reflecting national challenges such as vaccine hesitancy and operational issues. He also outlined that work was ongoing with partners to improve uptake, although delivery sat with NHS organisations.
 - d) Dr Ghosh agreed to explore future reporting including comparisons showing vaccination uptake alongside flu incidence rates, to better understand correlation. However, he advised that while population- level data may be available demonstrating that vaccination was generally effective, its impact varied from year to year. It was explained that flu vaccination uptake was continuously monitored and supported through ongoing campaigns and targeted engagement with underrepresented groups. Catch-up arrangements were also in place, particularly within schools, although coverage in wider populations relied on continued promotion and access. It was also advised that vulnerable individuals at risk of isolation were identified and supported through joint working between NHS and Adult Social Care services.
 - e) Mr Thomas- Sam outlined that the Technology- Enhanced Life (TEL) programme was delivering positive outcomes by supporting monitoring and early intervention. It was highlighted as a key part of the prevention agenda, with further work required to expand uptake, including increased awareness and use across care settings. Ms Hammond further highlighted ongoing engagement work to increase acceptance of the technology, alongside plans to pilot its use with care providers to support vulnerable residents and reduce the risk of falls. Miss Morton added that a digital patient monitoring system in nursing homes across the county had delivered positive outcomes in supporting residents to remain at home. She confirmed that funding had been secured to continue and expand the programme into the future.

- f) Ms Hammond explained that reducing reliance on residential care pathways would require more flexible, community- based services, combining social care with elements of health support. She highlighted that while the enablement service had been effective, further integration was needed. Furthermore, no additional government funding was currently anticipated, although opportunities would be pursued if they arose. Mr Thomas- Sam further outlined that in- house residential provision supported discharge and rehabilitation, enabling a significant proportion of individuals to return to their own homes, and emphasised the importance of a coordinated system response to manage demand pressures.
- g) Mr Thomas- Sam confirmed that examples of good practice had been identified, particularly in the delivery of enhanced community- based support. Work was underway with partners to develop a countywide model to share and replicate successful approaches.
- h) Dr Ghosh advised that vaccination data was reported as percentage uptake. He explained that population changes and shifts between age cohorts created additional challenges, although overall population change in Kent was limited. He also offered to provide additional demographic information to contextualise vaccination data, including population trends across age cohorts. Miss Morton added that a Kent- wide vaccination strategy was in development and would be brought forward in due course.
- i) Miss Morton advised that responsibility for flu vaccination delivery and messaging largely sat with NHS providers and commissioned providers. Dr Ghosh emphasised that vaccination was a key public health intervention, but uptake was influenced by a range of factors beyond communication campaigns. Efforts to improve uptake included enhanced messaging, addressing logistical challenges, and reviewing broader system factors. Work was also underway with partners to refresh the vaccination strategy across all programmes.
- j) Ms Hammond explained that eligibility criteria, including changes to free vaccine access for certain groups, may have impacted uptake, alongside wider factors influencing vaccination rates. She added that, in her view, any impact on vaccine uptakes were not related to cost, but rather to the ease of accessing vaccination.
- k) It was acknowledged that vaccine uptake among care workers had declined, but this was addressed through a targeted post-Christmas programme, with assurance that lessons had been learned and actions taken.
- l) Ms Hammond advised that, although average lengths of stay in a care setting had increased, the overall number of people requiring adult social care had reduced. She indicated that this could suggest a positive impact on longer-term demand, while emphasising that the primary challenge remained the cost of individual care packages.
- m) Mr Thomas- Sam confirmed that, although there had been a delay, fire safety works at Broadmeadow were on track. He also reported that targeted approaches to TELs were being developed through integrated neighbourhood

teams, with a focus on identifying and supporting higher- risk individuals, and that further work would be considered to expand this approach. Miss Morton highlighted that additional TEL sessions would be delivered in libraries across Kent to improve accessibility and support public engagement with technology.

- n) Ms Hammond confirmed that a forthcoming review would cover all aspects of the Better Care Fund. Progress had been delayed pending resolution of financial arrangements with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), which was close to agreement after which work on its future use would proceed.
 - o) Dr Ghosh advised that it would not be possible to calculate the counterfactual impact of flu vaccination at a local level due to technical complexity, but that analysis would focus on correlations between vaccination uptake and flu incidence.
3. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the item. These included:
- a) A Member highlighted previous discussion on staff vacancies and vaccination uptake across cohorts and concurred with officers that these be kept under regular review. It was further suggested that additional analysis be provided on how percentage figures related to absolute numbers, to give a clearer understanding of trends across different cohorts, and that the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee receive a report on this topic.
 - b) A Member emphasised the role of local leaders in supporting Adult Social Care and Public Health by promoting the importance of the flu vaccination programme and encouraging consistent messaging within their respective groups.
 - c) A Member expressed support for amplifying flu vaccination messaging and highlighted the range of communication channels, including social media, available to support this effort.
 - d) A Member welcomed the identification of key issues and requested that updates on lessons learned, pilots, and rollout activity be reported back to support Members in providing reassurance within their communities.
 - e) A Member reiterated a request that comparable data on vaccine uptake and flu impact be presented side by side, where possible, to provide clearer understanding, while recognising the limitations of statistical comparisons. A Member also emphasised the importance of including the accuracy of predictions alongside this data.
4. The Chairman summarised the debate and highlighted key areas for onward consideration for the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee, including the review of the Better Care Fund, the upcoming vaccination programme alongside the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee on that topic, and the role of local leadership in promoting uptake. The Chairman also commended the quality of the report and thanked officers for their work. The Chairman proposed to note the report and this was agreed by the Committee.

5. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

49. Call-in of Decision 26/00007 - Heritage Conservation Strategy Amendment (Item C1)

Michael Payne, representative of mill managers and volunteer groups, David Denman, Meopham Windmill Trust representative and Paul Allen, Chillenden Windmill Manager, were present for this item.

1. The Chairman invited Sarah Hudson, one of the call- in members to provide reasons for the call- in. Mrs Hudson spoke in support of preserving the eight windmills owned by the Council, highlighting their historic, cultural, educational and economic value. She argued that the windmills represented an important part of Kent's heritage and identity, and that their loss would be irreversible. Mrs Hudson also highlighted that the costs of maintaining the windmills were modest in comparison to their wider public value. Finally, she emphasised the benefits of preservation, including support for tourism, community engagement and education, and argued that further work should be undertaken to explore the creation of a trust to secure their long- term future.
2. Claudine Russell, another call-in member, expressed concern that the option of establishing a trust for the windmills had not been fully explored or appropriately assessed against value for money, deliverability and strategic outcomes. Ms Russell further questioned whether the decision aligned with the Council's strategic objective of delivering sustainable outcomes and best value for residents. She highlighted the collective value of windmills, the significant contribution of volunteers in their upkeep, and the relatively low and controlled maintenance costs. Ms Russell urged the Committee to recommend the decision be reconsidered with a view to exploring the potential for a trust to secure the windmills' long-term future.
3. Another call- in Member, Mark Hood, highlighted the significance of the windmills as valued community assets and expressed concern regarding the decision to depart from a previous Cabinet Committee recommendation. Mr Hood requested clarity on the rationale for this decision and whether it was supported by sufficient analysis in line with constitutional requirements. The importance of the windmills in terms of heritage, education and community identity was also emphasised by Mr Hood, and it was requested that a clear explanation of the benefits of not pursuing a trust be provided.
4. Michael Payne, addressing the Committee on behalf of mill managers and volunteers, also raised concerns about the decision- making process and whether sufficient analysis had been undertaken in departing from the previous recommendation to explore a trust. He reiterated the heritage significance of the windmills, the long- standing contribution of volunteer groups, and concerns regarding transparency of maintenance costs and current management arrangements. Mr Payne also questioned the lack of consideration of alternative options, including a heritage trust or community asset transfer, and cautioned against progressing with disposal without further examination of these options.

5. Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration, and Public Health, explained that the decision to divest the Council of its eight windmills had been taken under a previous administration following a full assessment of options, and clarified that the current item related to amendments to the Heritage Conservation Strategy to reflect that decision. He also outlined that the updated strategy presented to the Growth, Environment and Transport (GET) Cabinet Committee, included a number of proposed changes and updated policy positions.
6. Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Waste, explained that the amendments to the Heritage Conservation Strategy reflected the earlier decision to divest the windmills and ensure consistency with that position. He outlined that establishing a Council- led trust was not pursued as it would reduce flexibility for locally driven solutions, would be inconsistent with the decision to divest, and had already been considered and discounted as part of the 2023 options appraisal. Mr Smyth also clarified that community- led trust proposals would not be precluded and could be supported if brought forward and reiterated that Council funding for non- statutory services should be a last resort.
7. The Chairman invited questions and comments from Members, and the subsequent discussion covered the following:
 - a) Mr Smyth advised that proposals for a community-led trust would be supported by KCC. However, he explained that establishing a Council-led trust would be inconsistent with the approach of enabling local communities to determine the most appropriate arrangements following the decision to divest.
 - b) Members discussed the call-in procedures and the nature of the recommendation under consideration, including the requirement for the Cabinet Member to demonstrate that due regard had been given to the Cabinet Committee's recommendation and the clear reasons to not accept it. Mr Smyth further stated that the call-in provided an opportunity to clarify the rationale for the decision, which had been set out in the accompanying report. He explained that the option of establishing a trust had been considered previously as part of the wider options appraisal on whether to divest, and that proceeding with divestment reflected the outcome of that earlier assessment.
 - c) It was advised that support would be available to local groups seeking to take forward divestment, including guidance from Council officers. It was also explained that existing arrangements already supported collaboration and best practice sharing among windmill managers, and that while such cooperation would continue to be encouraged, this was distinct from establishing a formal trust, which would carry legal and financial implications for the Council.
 - d) In response to questions regarding the flexibility of a trust model, Mr Henderson stated that the Council's approach was for divestment to take place first, with any consideration of a trust to follow. He also indicated that pursuing a trust prior to divestment would be inconsistent with the agreed strategy.

- e) Mr Smyth advised that, following the GET Cabinet Committee recommendation, they reviewed the meeting discussion and previous documentation, and considered the implications of establishing a trust. This included internal officer discussions and engagement with Members, which informed the rationale and the reasons set out in the Scrutiny Committee report.
- f) Brian Collins, Deputy Leader, clarified that the Council's position was to fully support the establishment of community-led trusts or similar arrangements for individual windmills where appropriate, but not to create or operate a single Council-led trust. He further explained that the Council remained open to considering a range of options, that each windmill may require an individual solution, and that all proposals, including potential community asset transfers, would be considered over time.
- g) Rebecca Spore, Head of Infrastructure, outlined that while the Council did not have a formal community asset transfer policy, it operated under a disposal freehold policy that allowed for broader considerations. She set out that the disposal process was designed to ensure the sustainable future of the assets and was weighted accordingly, with community proposals welcomed. She also stated that freehold disposal did not preclude arrangements similar in nature to community asset transfer.
- h) Mrs Spore explained that the Council assessed disposal proposals against a range of criteria, not solely on achieving the highest receipt. Lower- value proposals may be supported where they delivered wider community benefits, in line with existing practice.
- i) Mr Smyth confirmed that the consultation responses were fully considered, with a report presented to Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee in 2024 including the consultation findings.
- j) It was clarified that the approach did not exclude the use of trusts, rather communities were empowered to decide for themselves whether to establish a trust or pursue another model. It was also confirmed that asset protection would be secured through conditions in the divestment process, separate from any decision on using a trust.
- k) Mr Smyth stated that financial considerations were a key factor in the decision to divest, particularly to remove ongoing costs, and that the trust model was considered inconsistent with this approach alongside broader policy factors.
- l) It was advised that the procedural issue under Reason 1 of the call-in arose from the absence of an explanation in the original decision paperwork for not following the Cabinet Committee's recommendation, although this had been since been addressed in the report to the Scrutiny Committee. Mr Smyth also confirmed that there had been no previous call-in made in relation to the August 2024 decision prior to the current call-in.

- m) Mr Collins clarified that while the Council remained open to proposals and aimed to be accommodating, no guarantees could be given on outcomes due to the unique nature of the sites.
 - n) Mr Smyth explained that the Council was open to community- led proposals and that the 2024 decision required both divestment and retention as community assets. He confirmed that criteria was in place to ensure a sustainable future and continued community access, with proposals not meeting these requirements excluded.
8. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the call-in. These included:
- a) A Member argued that Members had sufficient information to scrutinise the decision both in 2023 and in 2026, and that the process had been carried out appropriately. They emphasised the need to focus on the decision- making process rather than the emotive aspects of the subject matter and concluded that there was no evidence the process was improper, or that any escalation of the call- in was justified.
 - b) A Member expressed concern that the decision could reduce future availability of windmills and criticised the dismissal of a trust option as based on subjective reasoning. They stated that a cross- party Committee had supported exploring a trust and felt there had been no thorough explanation for rejecting it. Finally, he argued that the decision appeared primarily financially driven and not in residents' best interests.
 - c) It was raised that Cabinet Member decisions should clearly address and respond to recommendations made by Cabinet Committees to avoid gaps and the need for further scrutiny.
 - d) A Member highlighted strong public opposition to divestment and stated that, although no formal recommendation for a trust was made, the Cabinet Committee had requested reconsideration which had not taken place. They argued that a trust would support local groups and align with policy, and that rejecting it could increase, rather than reduce risks for the Council.
 - e) A Member emphasised that the call-in was valid and reiterated support for a trust to protect the mills and manage costs. They argued that, if a trust was not pursued, the Council should prioritise safeguarding the mills' long- term heritage use in future decisions.
 - f) A Member clarified that the Council was not proposing to establish a trust itself, but to support local groups in forming their own. They acknowledged that some mills may pass into community or private ownership, with the Council's role focused on facilitation rather than direct control.
 - g) A Member stated that the mill's listed status limited their potential for conservation and highlighted that the existing strategy committed to establishing a trust to coordinate management and support volunteer groups. They emphasised that this did not require the trust to directly manage the mills. It was also added that all windmills were listed, mostly Grade II* or

Grade I, providing strong internal and external protection and preventing conversion to residential use.

9. Following the debate, the Chairman welcomed proposals from the Committee:

- a) Mr Hood proposed and Mrs Hudson seconded option (d) in the report to 'require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.' The Chairman emphasised that this option was generally reserved for the most serious matters of fraud or mismanagement by the Council.
- b) Members voted on the motion. The motion failed.
- c) Mr Thomas proposed and Mr Eustace seconded option (b) in the report to 'express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision'. The Committee expressed the following comment:
 - i. The administration should seek to ensure the protection of windmills going forward in accordance with the policy of the Council.
- d) Members voted on the motion. The motion passed by majority vote.

10. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision. The Committee expressed the following comment:

- i. The administration should seek to ensure the protection of windmills going forward in accordance with the policy of the Council.

50. Short Focused Inquiry - Water Supply Issues *(Item D1)*

1. The item was introduced by John Moreland, Chairman of the Water Supply Short Focused Inquiry (SFI), who highlighted the cross- party collaboration and input from officers and community stakeholders in shaping the recommendations, including actions for KCC and wider considerations for other relevant organisations.
2. In response to questions and comments from Members, discussion covered the following:
 - a) The SFI was praised as a strong example of cross- party collaboration, highlighting the significant work undertaken by the Chairman, officers and relevant stakeholders. Various Members commended the report as clear, concise, and containing recommendations that would benefit the people of Kent.
 - b) It was clarified that the term 'regulatory legal instruments' referred to standard regulatory requirements applying to treatment works, rather than special measures.

- c) It was indicated that updates to the water disruption plan were expected within two months, reflecting the SFI's recommendation for prompt action.
 - d) It was confirmed that upon the Committee's formal noting of the report, the recommendations would be sent to the administration, with a response expected within two months.
 - e) A Member highlighted that various wider issues such as funding and infrastructure recognised during the SFI may have fallen outside of KCC's control and therefore may require future lobbying at a national level.
3. The Chairman proposed the Committee note the Short- Focused Inquiry Report into Water Supply, and confirm that it be submitted to the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members along with a request for a formal response to the recommendations within two months. This was agreed by the Committee.
 4. RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Short- Focused Inquiry Report into Water Supply, and confirm that it be submitted to the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members along with a request for a formal response to the recommendations within two months.

51. Work Programme

(Item D2)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.