

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Wednesday, 19 November 2025.

PRESENT: Mr B Collins, Mrs B Fordham, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr P King, Mrs C Palmer, Mr D Wimble and Mr P Osborne

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs G Foster (Substitute for Miss D Morton), Mr C Hespe (Substitute for Mr M Fraser Moat) and Mrs M Lawes (Substitute for Mr P Webb

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Mrs S Hammond (Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), Mrs C Head (Head of Finance Operations), Mr J Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mrs J Dixon-Sherreard (Policy Manager), McKay (Acting Chief Accountant), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance) and Ms C McInnes (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education) and Mrs G Little (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

114. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Miss Morton, Mr Webb and Mr Fraser-Moat. The following Deputy Cabinet Members attended the meeting to provide updates on their respective portfolios, Mrs Foster, Mrs Lawes and Mr Hespe.

115. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda

(Item 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

116. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 September 2025

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 25 September 2025 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair

117. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

- 1. Mrs Foster Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) Members were informed that the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care had recently left the authority to join Nottingham City, closer to his home. He was acknowledged as one of the longest-serving Directors of Adult Social Services at Kent County Council, having joined shortly before the Covid pandemic. Mrs Foster expressed her thanks and wished him well for the future.
- (b) It was also noted that the interim Corporate Director of Adult Social Care, Sarah Hammond, had been warmly welcomed. It was reported that, despite the initial challenges of her first weeks, including overseeing the recent Ofsted inspection, Mrs Hammond had made a strong start, and officers had responded positively.
- (c) Visits had been undertaken to both commissioned organisations and in-house services, which continued to deliver exceptional work. The Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Members had observed a range of initiatives, from technology-enabled living solutions such as sensors and falls mats supporting independence and safety, to therapeutic activities including bread baking. Visits were also undertaken to integrated care centres, each working towards the shared goal of helping people return home sooner and providing vital respite for carers when caring responsibilities become overwhelming.
- (d) Several key decisions had been taken in recent months, including the conclusion of the Transformation Programme for Public Health, resulting in services becoming more targeted and efficient. It was reported that close partnership working with the NHS continued, and the first meeting of the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board under the current administration had been held. The Board was identified as a key forum for driving ideas and change, particularly in alignment with the NHS 10-year plan. Members were informed that the Board brought together district councils and wider system partners, and that an invitation would be extended to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to join in the future to ensure their voice remained central in shaping health and wellbeing across Kent.
- (e) The formal introduction of a new integrated brokerage service within hospital discharge hubs across all acute trusts was announced. This was highlighted as a major achievement following months of collaboration. Mrs Foster thanked the team for their work over the past six months. The new approach would ensure every person leaving hospital was assessed and directed to appropriate care in the right setting and at the right cost, improving discharge times, outcomes, and coordination between health and social care.
- (f) Maidstone had recently hosted the Baton of Hope, the UK's largest suicide prevention initiative, as part of its tour of Kent. The event was described as an important opportunity to raise awareness, support those affected by suicide, and promote hope and connection. It was noted that many participants concluded the day at Dreamland in Margate, celebrating achievements and honouring loved ones lost. The event had been a moving occasion for families, friends, and communities

(g) The [Accommodation Market Position Statement](#) (MPS) went to the Adult Social Care cabinet Committee on 12th November 2025. The MPS set out Kent County Council's strategic direction for the future of housing and care for adults who drew on social care, whilst also recognising the needs of young people transitioning to adulthood and care leavers. It was highlighted that accommodation was an area where Kent County Council needed to play a shaping role, but could not act alone. The Council would continue working closely with district councils, housing associations, developers, and care providers to ensure people had the right home in the right place with the right support. It was acknowledged that demand was rising and, while further work was required, there was a clear opportunity to expand modern, accessible housing, particularly extra care homes, to help people live independently for longer. The MPS was a call to partners to invest, collaborate, and innovate in shaping the future of housing and care across Kent.

(h) Safeguarding Awareness Week was taking place from 17 to 23 December. At special request, members were invited to attend training sessions on this topic. It was emphasised that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility and that this was an important opportunity to refresh understanding and strengthen commitment to protecting vulnerable adults and children across Kent.

2. Mrs Mary Lawes (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities) provided an update on the following:

(a) The Community Safety Team had organised and hosted a domestic homicide learning event focused on the impact on mothers who were separated from their children. Over 170 professionals had attended, including 20 from community safety partnerships outside Kent, and the feedback had been excellent. It was also reported that all Community Wardens were undergoing training in youth engagement. The training focused on effective engagement around antisocial behaviour within communities, which was regarded as a positive initiative.

(b) The Dartford and Gresham Community Warden Team had delivered its Water Smart Programme in partnership with local organisations. The programme provided free water safety training for local children in the area.

(c) The Committee noted that Trading Standards had been very active during the recent period. The team had worked hard in the lead-up to the fireworks season to ensure the safe storage and sale of fireworks. Two videos on fireworks safety had been shared on the Council's social media channels, one of which featured Mr Webb, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services. It was also reported that the Trading Standards Port Team had hosted a visit to the Port and Sevington, which had provided valuable insight into their operations and highlighted the excellent work carried out by the team.

- (d) Trading Standards had supported the National Crime Agency in an operation in Kent targeting premises linked to organised crime and money laundering. Illicit tobacco, vapes, nicotine pouches, and counterfeit La Boo-Boo dolls had been seized. It was further reported that, following a detailed investigation by Trading Standards, a four-week trial at Maidstone Crown Court had resulted in three defendants being convicted of fraud relating to solar panels.
- (e) The Trading Standards Team had dismantled a major counterfeiting operation in and around the Dartford area. Over £300,000 worth of counterfeit goods, including cigarettes, tobacco, clothing, cosmetics, and perfumes, had been removed from the marketplace. The perpetrator had been sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, and 150 hours of unpaid community work.
- (f) Trading Standards had launched the Acid Aware campaign to tackle the rising threat of acid attacks. It was reported that the UK ranked fourth highest for acid attacks and that Kent was the fourth most affected area in England, with 31 corrosive substance attacks recorded in 2023. The campaign, developed by Trading Standards in collaboration with Growth, Communities, Innovation and Business Intelligence, aimed to support retailers in complying with the law and empower communities to identify and report suspicious sales of corrosive substances. The campaign had been very well received.
- (g) Senior Coroner, Mrs Harding, had attended the High Sheriff Service at Canterbury Cathedral. The service had provided an annual opportunity for judges and those administering justice to come together to pray for guidance, wisdom, and humility in discharging their duties, and had been addressed by Lord Reid, President of the Supreme Court. It was also reported that Kent Ambassadors had visited the facilities at Oakwood House in Maidstone to learn about the Coroner Service and the facilities provided there.
- (h) Kent Scientific Services had hosted a delegation of Kent Ambassadors at Oakwood House to learn about the Coroner Service and the facilities available to support bereaved families. It was also reported that Kent Scientific Services had hosted a visit from a delegation of scientists and officials from the Association of South Asian Nations, who sought to understand the scientific methods used in the UK to support food and feed controls.
- (i) Mr Webb, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, along with Mrs Lawes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities attended the Dover Discovery Centre to view the new library being built there. The facilities were described as incorporating the historic ruins surrounding the Centre and providing modern features, including quiet spaces for reading alongside areas designed for family-friendly interaction. The visit had been regarded as highly informative and impressive.

- (j) The consultation period and proposals for Folkestone Library had closed on 31 October. It was reported that Kent County Council was now reviewing the bids received, including proposals from Creative Folkestone, ahead of a planned decision in early 2026. Announcements regarding the outcome were expected in January 2026.
- (k) Mrs Lawes noted that it had been a busy period for library projects, with three further building projects underway at Temple Hill, Cranbrook, and Sittingbourne libraries. All three libraries were currently closed while works were carried out to co-locate Family Hub services. Once complete, the libraries would deliver a wider range of services from a single building, enabling Kent County Council to dispose of buildings no longer required. It was reported that funding for these developments had been secured through contributions. All three sites were expected to reopen in early 2026. Stanhope Library had already been completed, and further co-locations at Cliftonville and Queensborough were expected to be delivered.
- (l) Libraries had achieved Customer Service Excellence accreditation. Both Mr Webb and Mrs Lawes had observed the passion, knowledge, and innovative approaches demonstrated by library staff to attract and engage visitors. The award and accompanying report had highlighted the outstanding commitment of staff.

2.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following

- (a) A question was raised by Mr Collins, Deputy Leader, who expressed pleasure at the progress on libraries and asked for confirmation that recent reports suggesting the Council intended to close libraries were incorrect. In response, Mrs Lawes confirmed that the reports were not correct.

3. Mr Paul King (Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Coastal Regeneration) provided an update on the following:

- (a) With regard to international rail, following Kent County Council's successful hosting of the Growing Kent event in late September at Ashford and Ebbsfleet stations, attended by over 100 stakeholders including the Minister for Rail and potential operators, the Office of Rail and Road granted Virgin Trains access to Temple Mills International Depot in October. This opened the possibility of competition and future stopping services. Virgin indicated that, if Ashford and Ebbsfleet international stations were reopened, they would include Kent stops. Stakeholder support was noted as essential.
- (b) The Leader had attended the HS1 All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) meeting, where the Office of Rail and Road's recent decision regarding Temple Mills depot was discussed, along with next steps for reopening Ashford and Ebbsfleet stations. It was further reported that, following the APPG meeting, the Department for Transport's Head of International Rail

confirmed that the DfT, Home Office, and Border Force would join a working group to support the reinstatement of international rail services to Kent stations.

- (c) The Kent Property Market Report 2025–26 had been launched. It was reported that Kent County Council officers had worked in partnership with Caxtons Property Consultants to produce the report, stepping in at short notice following the closure of Locate in Kent. The launch event at Ashford International Hotel had been attended by over 250 property and development professionals and included a keynote speech from Praxis, which had recently acquired 500,000 square feet of commercial office space in Kings Hill, the largest deal in Kent for over a decade. It was noted that logistics and distribution were key growth sectors.
- (d) Following the administration of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent in September, officers led by the Head of Economy, Steve Sampson, had worked to establish a new in-house visitor and inward investment service. It was reported that the team was now being onboarded, with immediate priorities and long-term plans focused on promoting tourism and attracting business. This work was being delivered with limited resources and with support from colleagues in Medway, leveraging expertise to maintain Kent's profile.
- (e) The Straits Committee, formed five years ago with support from the British Embassy and partners in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Kent County Council, had assisted in launching the Cross-Channel Geopark Festival earlier in November to support a UNESCO status application, which had recently been submitted. It was reported that Mr Wimble, Cabinet Member for Environment, had attended the festival and that Mr King had attended his first Straits Cabinet meeting in Pas-de-Calais last week. Following this, a ministerial letter had been sent to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requesting the return of Interreg 2 Seas funding to KCC. It was also noted that a delegation from West Flanders, including wine growers with economic interests, was visiting Kent in recent days to explore opportunities in the wine industry, including a visit to the NIAB Wine Innovation Centre.
- (f) Earlier in October the Leader and Mr King had visited the NIAB East Malling Research Station and met with industry representatives and farmers to discuss the importance of hard and soft fruit production. It was reported that Kent was a national and global leader in agricultural technologies, and discussions focused on innovation, skills, and employment opportunities within Kent's leading agricultural sector.
- (g) An update was provided on the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF). It was reported that the fund offered interest-free loans ranging from £26,000 to £600,000 to businesses demonstrating growth, productivity, job creation, and innovation. Since its relaunch in November 2023, 66 loans totalling £8.24 million had been approved. At the most recent board meeting, 10 businesses had loans approved amounting to nearly £1 million.

(h) With regard to the No Use Empty (NUE) programme, it was reported that Mr King had visited sites in Dover and Thanet where projects funded by NUE had brought empty homes, new builds, and commercial units back into use. A total of 128 properties had been returned to use in the quarter. NUE had also been authorised to borrow an additional £6 million from the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) to support workspace creation. Further visits to projects in Folkestone and Herne Bay were planned.

(i) The Connect to Work scheme, launched on 30 June, had 395 participants from Kent and Medway. To date, nine jobs had been secured and seven clients retained employment. Stakeholder engagement, particularly within the health sector, continued to boost referrals. The scheme was designed to support individuals with long-term health conditions, disabilities, and disadvantaged groups, including ex-offenders.

(j) An update was provided on the Skills Bootcamp. Since July, nearly 200 learners had enrolled across more than 20 courses in construction, rail, health, and social care. Providers included SALT Training, Engaged Train Support, and a social enterprise camp. Engaged Train Support delivered construction bootcamps at the Lower Thames Crossing, with the first cohort starting on 13 November. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Jamie Henderson, visited the site last week. To date, 15% positive outcomes were achieved, including new jobs, promotions, and contracts, and 50 interviews were scheduled for other learners.

(k) An update was provided on Broadband and digital infrastructure. Following the ministerial letter, a meeting had been held with BDUK and CityFibre, the service delivery partners. The discussion had focused on residents' concerns regarding transparency on project timelines, particularly when committing to broadband contracts. It was noted that the process was complex, with challenges and commercial sensitivities limiting information sharing. BDUK only covered areas not taken up by major providers such as Sky and Virgin. Residents' frustrations had been raised, and the need for clearer information had been emphasised. A Code Checker tool showing build plans and timelines had been identified, though implementation was expected to take time. Pressure on BDUK to improve delivery and communication was to continue.

4. Mr David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Environment), provided an update on the following:

(a) The *Kent Environment Portfolio* update reported significant achievements. Drapers Windmill had achieved Grade II status, recognising its historic and architectural importance. This upgrade reflected decades of partnership between Drapers Windmill Trust and Kent County Council. MEP and Windmill had reopened to the public in September following major restoration, led by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Lady Colgrain. Davison's Mill in Stelling Minnis also had its sails restored this summer, coinciding with Heritage Open Day on 21 September.

- (b) Eight country parks had retained the prestigious Green Flag Award, and six parks achieved gold at the South and South East in Bloom Competition, with Grove Ferry crowned Country Park of the Year.
- (c) Reuse shops had been launched at New Romney and Allington, reducing waste and supporting local charities. Allington alone saved 10,000 tonnes of waste in two weeks, demonstrating the impact of the circular economy.
- (d) The food waste campaign had saved over £260,000, with bin stickers driving a 20% increase in food waste recycling. Plans were in place to expand this initiative countywide.
- (e) Household Waste Recycling Centres continued to deliver excellent service, with 96% of 6,469 users satisfied and 74% able to book a slot on the same day. Future plans included increasing booking flexibility and extending opening hours.
- (f) The Cross Channel Geopark partnership with Northern France had submitted its application to become the world's first UNESCO Global Geopark spanning a sea border. The milestone was celebrated with a festival at Dover Castle on 7–8 November, which was well attended and showcased Kent's leadership in cultural and environmental innovation.
- (g) The *Solar Together Kent and Medway* scheme had installed over 3,730 rooftop solar systems, delivering nearly 17 megawatts of clean energy and 270 retrofit batteries, avoiding 3,800 tonnes of carbon emissions in one year.
- (h) Preparations were underway to plant 6,000 new trees, supported by a £40,000 Tree Council grant. Additionally, £150,000 had been secured through Growing Kent and Medway to boost food, farming, and drink innovation.

4.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

- (a) In response to whether a levy would be introduced on the Kent road network, Mr Wimble advised that work had continued on proposals for a lorry levy to align Kent with European counterparts. Kent experienced a far greater impact on road infrastructure, with approximately 18,000 lorries passing through channel ports daily, causing significant damage. The approach was not intended as a simple tax but as a strategic measure to redirect funds toward highways. France had introduced a similar levy, charging €0.15 per kilometre for lorries. Discussions had taken place with government ministers and agencies to build a business case and convey the right message. While implementation was not expected in the near future, a clear direction of travel was anticipated within 12–18 months.

5. **Mrs Beverley Fordham (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) Significant changes had continued across the education landscape, including mainstream and special educational needs (SEND). The Government's White Paper remained delayed; however, initiatives and policies were to be progressed as planned.
- (b) No feedback had been received regarding the Swanley SEND School build, which appeared to have been paused. The need for additional capacity remained urgent, as demand for places continued to grow. Mrs Fordham confirmed plans to contact Kent MPs to secure support for progressing the build, stressing that children could not wait for government decisions and that additional provision was essential.
- (c) The Government introduced a new Ofsted inspection framework, replacing the previous single-word ratings such as "Outstanding" or "Good." At the Head Teachers' Welcome Event, detailed guidance was provided on the new system, which assessed schools across six areas, each scored on a five-point scale. These areas included inclusion, attendance, behaviour, and wellbeing. Mrs Fordham highlighted the importance of parents understanding the new criteria to make informed decisions about schools.
- (d) The Government had introduced a new post-16 education framework, which aimed to improve pathways for young people transitioning from school into employment, training, or further education. Mrs Fordham expressed strong interest in this sector, noting its importance for creating meaningful opportunities for young people. As part of engagement activity, visits had been made to schools, special schools, and post-16 establishments, including North Kent College alongside Social Care colleagues. During these visits, digital tools and new resources introduced to support career development were reviewed. These innovations were considered exciting and capable of opening up new career opportunities for young people. Mrs Fordham indicated plans to work closely with colleges to promote these opportunities and raise awareness among students. Colleges had received significant investment, aligning with the economic portfolio's focus on growth sectors such as construction, digital technology, agriculture, and care. These developments provided important pathways for young people; however, capacity remained insufficient to meet demand. The Council was therefore reviewing countywide options to identify additional pathways and ensure provision for those leaving school, particularly for students who did not achieve the required grades for sixth form or college entry. Mrs Fordham highlighted the national and local challenge of NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) figures, which continued to rise. Work was underway to address this by exploring alternatives for young people requiring extra support, particularly at Level 1 and Level 2. The 16+ Pathway Group was actively working with schools, colleges, and community partners to develop local solutions. As a strategic authority, the Council was developing a 16+ Strategic Framework to ensure every young person could access appropriate opportunities within their communities. This framework aimed to improve outcomes, support aspirations, and reduce future negative impacts on social care. Mrs Fordham emphasised the importance of collaboration and innovation to deliver better pathways for young people.

(e) The high needs budget remained in overspend, and work was underway to reduce this over the next two years. A new open framework for contracts had been developed to improve strategic alignment, cost control, and placement decisions across SEND and post-16 provision. The framework aimed to strengthen relationships with independent providers and deliver better outcomes for young people while ensuring fiscal responsibility. A supplier launch was scheduled for December to share details and support engagement.

5.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) It was asked whether anything could be done locally to address the significant overspend on SEND, given uncertainty around future government funding. It was confirmed that the issue was national and budget details were still awaited. However, even with additional funding, the priority remained on improving outcomes for children. Work was also focused on local provision, including rolling out approximately 55 Special Resource Provisions over the next two to three years. A streamlined process for delivery had also been developed to accelerate implementation. These provisions aimed to meet needs locally, reduce travel costs, enable school collaboration, and improve cost control. This approach would reduce reliance on independent placements, improve quality oversight, and help manage costs, contributing to reducing the overspend.

6. Mrs Christine Palmer (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) provided an update on the following:

(a) On 20 September, the first visit was made to the Kent County Council Youth Group. Members were welcomed and shown initiatives currently underway. The group was in the process of electing a new Youth Council, with voting due to conclude at the end of the week. Ballot boxes were scheduled to be collected on Monday, and results would follow shortly. The new Youth Council administration would select its priorities at its first meeting. A meeting was also held with staff facilitating the Youth Council. Due to increasing interest from Cabinet Members, it was agreed that a pre-attendance form may be introduced in the new year to manage visits and ensure appropriate arrangements.

(b) On 21 September, Mrs Palmer attended the Virtual School Under-16s Awards at Kingswood Activity Centre, Ashford, alongside other KCC councillors. This was the first opportunity to observe the strong relationships between foster families, carers, and kinship carers with looked-after children under 16. The event highlighted the vital role and commitment of foster carers in supporting young people.

(c) On 30 September, a visit was made to St Peter's House in Broadstairs, where many social workers are based. The visit provided an opportunity to meet frontline staff and discuss challenges, including the shortage and retention of social workers in Kent. It was noted that a previous cap on apprenticeship training, due to limited qualified mentors, was now being

reviewed with the aim of lifting it to allow more apprenticeships and improve retention. This was expected to reduce reliance on agency staff. Staff also requested reinstatement of desk space removed during COVID, as more employees wished to return to office working. This matter was being considered.

- (d) On 9 October, Mrs Palmer attended the launch of *Run*, a film produced in collaboration with 90 authorities nationwide to promote fostering and recruit foster families. The film, described as hard-hitting, highlighted the transformative impact of fostering on young people's lives and formed part of the Council's recruitment campaign. The film was available on YouTube for public viewing. Work was ongoing to incorporate fostering recruitment branding into councillor communications, including letters and emails, to further support the campaign.
- (e) On 10 October, Mrs Palmer attended the Big Mental Health Conversation at Detling Showground, hosted by members of the Kent Youth Council. The event successfully addressed the challenges of youth mental health and featured stalls promoting support for carers, young carers, and peer-to-peer assistance among young people. The day was considered highly inspiring and highlighted the importance of open dialogue and accessible support services.
- (f) A visit was made to the Family Hub in Swanscombe, which highlighted the vital role of family hubs in providing preventative support for new parents and helping children progress through school. The hub also played an important role in early identification of special needs or developmental delays, ensuring timely intervention and support.
- (g) The Ofsted inspection had been completed, and the draft response was awaited. Mrs Palmer expressed thanks to all staff involved, noting the significant work and information gathering required to showcase the positive achievements of Children and Young People's Services. Further updates would follow upon receipt of the draft report.
- (h) On 14 November, the Cabinet Member opened the Foster Carer, Kinship Carer, and Supported Homes Awards at a hotel in Maidstone, attended by the Leader and Chairman. The event was described as highly emotional, with stories highlighting the exceptional commitment of foster families and the vital role they play in supporting children and young people.
- (i) Two of the four children's homes planned to return in-house had completed purchase. Planning applications were submitted to Swale and Ashford Borough Councils, and progress was being monitored.
- (j) Discussions had taken place with Ingrid Crisan (Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services) regarding restorative justice. Interest had been shown by voluntary sector organisations in providing more meaningful and rewarding activities for young people entering the youth justice system. The aim was to introduce alternatives that promoted wellbeing and achievement, moving beyond traditional tasks such as litter picking and graffiti removal.

(k) Peacock House was undergoing renovation and was scheduled to open next year as one of the new reception centres.

6.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Leader commented on the Foster Carer and Kinship Caring Awards held on 14 November, describing the event as deeply moving and highlighting the extraordinary commitment and sacrifices made by foster carers in supporting vulnerable children. The Leader emphasised that such carers should be celebrated year-round. The Leader also noted the popularity of the Youth Council and confirmed interest in attending a future session. Additionally, it was suggested that the film *Run* be shown at the next all-member meeting to raise awareness and support its promotion.

(b) Clarification was sought regarding Peacock House, with concerns about misinformation suggesting the centre was already in use and occupied. It was confirmed that Peacock House was not yet operational and was scheduled to open in the new year. Individuals seen at the site were builders carrying out renovation work.

7. Mr Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) provided an update on the following:

(a) The Bus Service Improvement Plan had been rolled out, making bus travel across Kent easier and quicker. Targeted subsidies ensured 150 essential routes continued to operate, supporting access to work, school, and training. The Kent Travel Saver became more affordable, benefiting over 27,000 families. Smarter Transport initiatives saved £2.5 million for children, young people, and education.

(b) In Highways, a new online pothole reporting system was launched, improving navigation and progress tracking.

(c) The EU Entry/Exit System was implemented smoothly at Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover.

(d) The Road Safety and Active Travel Team delivered 56 council meetings, 33 funded schemes, and significant investment in safer roads through Highways Improvement Plans, supported by KCC and parish contributions. Education programmes reached thousands, from young children to mature drivers, and the Summer Drink Drive Campaign engaged 1.4 million people.

(e) Under Major Projects and Repairs, Galley Hill restoration was underway, with options for a new bridge or embankment being explored. Assessments continued at the Road of Remembrance in Folkestone following the cliff collapse. Works at Bearsted were progressing well, and improvements at Bluebell Hill were moving forward. The Rapid Electric Vehicle Charger Project launched this month.

- (f) With a £67 million budget, Highways Maintenance achievements included repairing 22,000 potholes, patching the equivalent of 35 Wembley stadiums, resurfacing 210,000 square metres, and treating 825,000 square metres of road.
- (g) the Highways Term Maintenance Contract with Ringway Infrastructure Services Ltd was signed, commencing 1 May 2026. This long-term competitive contract was key to delivering highway improvements. Thanks were extended to all involved, with special recognition for Officer Mr L. Borner for his exceptional efforts.

7.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

- (a) It was asked how long the 50mph speed limit on the A299 would remain in place, noting the impact on travel times for those regularly using the route. It was confirmed that the speed limit had been reduced from the national limit to 50mph over nine miles to ensure public safety, adding approximately three minutes to journeys. The road required major works estimated at tens of millions of pounds, which were currently unfunded. Efforts were ongoing to work with the Department for Transport to secure funding, and lobbying would continue.

8. Mr Chris Hespe (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Cross-Cabinet Activity) provided an update on the following:

- (a) Mr Hespe noted that the Department of Local Government Efficiency (DoLGE) continued to go from strength to strength and highlighted key areas of work. Thanks were extended to finance colleagues, the Chief Executive, and senior staff for their support and commitment to achieving best value for every pound spent by the County Council.
- (b) The Group had worked to stabilise KCC's budget following a challenging financial position, which included £732m of debt, daily interest payments of £84,000, a £20m overspend, and a growing adult social care budget. A savings and income target of £121m had been allocated for the year. Significant progress had been made, with the immediate challenge being the current year's budget while preparing for future years.
- (c) Kent's first commercial strategy had been produced, with a major company engagement event planned for January. A training module for staff involved in contracts and procurement was being rolled out, and the Contract Management Review Group had been reconvened with a stronger focus and regular meetings. More Council spend was now directed to Kent-based businesses compared to the previous year, aligning with the new strategic statement, *Reforming Kent*.
- (d) On 13 November, the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee received a paper outlining DoLGE's remit, activities, and governance, and agreed six-monthly progress reporting. The Group had reviewed all budget lines and examined areas of spend for efficiency improvements, including home-to-

school transport, non-attributable costs, LATCos, and adult social care. Several recommendations for savings in the current year would be implemented shortly under delegated authority.

- (e) Adult social care remained the biggest challenge, and a solid foundation for future prioritisation had been established with the new Strategic Director. DoLGE had contributed to planning for the 2026–27 budget and beyond, discussing savings and efficiency proposals with Cabinet Members. Future spend avoidance actions had been taken to enable re-prioritisation of work benefiting residents, including initiatives on Net Zero and the strategic headquarters.
- (f) The Group had also shaped KCC's local government reorganisation proposals to avoid significant tax rises for residents and businesses, and supported rescinding the Climate Emergency Declaration to allow energy proposals to be considered on business case strength and enable SME participation in contracts.

8.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

- (a) The question was asked as to whether there any expectation of central government funding or assistance with the cost of transition to LGR, or would this be borne by either the council taxpayer or council revenues. Mr Hespe confirmed that the current position was that no funding had been allocated by central government for the transition or for any long-term additional costs arising from LGR. These costs could be considerable and were expected to be met through existing resources and reserves. Meeting these costs could therefore involve reducing services, restructuring service delivery, depleting reserves, or a combination of these measures. This was why the County Council's proposal for Option 1A, which had the lowest costs and was the most economically viable, was considered the sensible solution for Kent.

9. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) provided an update on the following:

- (a) Mr Collins, reflected on the progress made since May, noting the significant improvements achieved in just over six months. He observed the enthusiasm of Members regarding future plans and long-term benefits for residents, while acknowledging that savings and cuts remained necessary. Mr Collins expressed appreciation to officers for their support and guidance, which had enabled this progress.
- (b) He highlighted the challenging financial position inherited from the previous administration, including £732m of debt, which had already been reduced by £67m and was expected to reach £80m by year-end. This reduction would lower interest payments and allow more funds to remain in the revenue budget for services.
- (c) Mr Collins emphasised that Adult Social Care (ASC) continued to present the greatest budgetary challenge. He noted that if ASC were excluded, most departments were on or close to budget, with only minor overspends.

He called on opposition Members to work collaboratively and join efforts to secure increased central government funding for ASC, which was a national issue with demand rising by around 10% annually.

(d) He reported that recent discussions with Mrs Hammond, in her position as Interim Corporate Director for Adult Social Care had been constructive, identifying opportunities for savings and efficiencies. While further details would follow, progress was being made and should be recognised. Mr Collins concluded by urging all Members to focus on residents' needs rather than party politics and reiterated that, despite challenges, the Council was performing well overall.

9.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) The Council had recently identified an unpaid Adult Social Care debt of around £73m, two-thirds of which related to residential care invoices. It was asked whether a review had been undertaken to enforce stricter collection measures, noting the unfairness for families who pay on time. Mr Collins, confirmed that the issue had been discussed and that procedures were in place to recover the majority of the debt. He stressed the need for fairness, noting that those who had agreed to pay should honour their commitments. While enforcement would not involve evictions or seizure of goods, the Council would take steps to ensure debts were collected. Further details would follow.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

**118. 25/00095 - Revenue and Capital Budget Forecast Outturn Report - Quarter 2
(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 Collins (Deputy Leader of Kent County Council) introduced the report that provided details of the Council's financial position as at the end of September 2025-26, which included progress against savings targets within the revenue budget, capital cash limit changes made between Q1 and Q2 and monitoring updates for reserves, treasury management and prudential indicators. Mr Collins, reported that the forecast outturn variance was a £46.5m overspend, representing 3% of the overall budget. He stated that the scale of the overspend was unprecedented, posed a critical risk to the Authority's financial resilience, and required urgent action. Due to the exceptional position, additional commentary had been provided in the report outlining actions being implemented across the Authority and specific measures within the Adult Social Care and Health Directorate to address the overspend in the current financial year. The most significant overspend was in Adult Social Care and Health, totalling £50.9m, driven by savings no longer expected to be achieved and service-related pressures, particularly in older people's residential and home care services. This

reflected ongoing financial challenges in the adult social care sector nationally. Further overspends were forecast in Children, Young People and Education, mainly due to high-cost packages for looked-after children with disabilities, partially offset by underspends in home-to-school transport. There was a small overspend in Growth, Environment and Transport, primarily due to the English National Concessionary Scheme, and underspends in the Chief Executive's Department, Deputy Chief Executive's Department, and non-attributable costs. Savings for the year totalled £121m, with £98m expected to be delivered in 2025-26, representing 81% of the target. The schools' delegated budgets position largely reflected demand for special educational needs support and was funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, with a government announcement expected later in the year. The Capital Forecast Outturn position showed a £35.4m underspend against budget, comprising a £26.2m real variance and a £61.6m rephasing variance. Mr Collins noted that these figures were based on forecasts from the previous administration and stated that, given the circumstances, progress was being made.

2. Mr Betts added that the financial challenge was exceptional and that plans were in place to reduce the overspend as far as possible. Actions were detailed in the report and were being monitored regularly to minimise the impact on reserves and improve the position for the next financial year.
3. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) It was noted that these statutory costs were placing significant strain on councils nationally and that central government should assume greater responsibility. Mr Collins, agreed with the points raised and stated that the Council must provide statutory services, but acknowledged this was a national problem that should not rest solely with local authorities. He warned that without increased government funding, councils would face difficult choices, including cutting essential services or considering significant council tax increases, though no decision had been made. Mr Collins noted that if Adult Social Care were excluded, the Council's financial position would appear much stronger. He urged government to deliver the delayed Fair Funding Review and increase grant payments, stressing that additional funding for Adult Social Care was essential for all councils.
4. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:
 - a) NOTE the revenue and capital forecast outturn position for 2025-26 as detailed in the report, and accompanying appendices
 - b) NOTE the implementation of actions to mitigate the revenue overspend, both within Adult Social Care & Health specifically and across the authority
 - c) AGREE the revenue and capital budget adjustments detailed in the report

119. 25/00101 - KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway
(Item 6)

David Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance) and Jenny Dixon-Sherreard (Strategy Manager, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance) were in attendance for this item

1. The Leader introduced the item, presenting the final version of Kent County Council's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Kent and Medway for Cabinet approval, prior to submission to Government by the 28 November deadline.
2. The Leader reiterated that KCC had not sought LGR but, as Government was progressing with the process, the Council had a responsibility to ensure any reorganisation delivered maximum benefit for Kent residents and minimised risk.
3. The Strategic Business Case proposed a single Kent and Medway Council with devolved area assemblies as the most viable option. This model was identified as the lowest cost to implement, the fastest to achieve payback, the highest net saver, and the fairest to communities. The proposal maintained Kent's integrity as a single county, avoided risks associated with fragmenting critical services such as social care, and preserved the scale needed to manage pressures linked to Kent's border location.
4. It balanced strategic capacity with local responsiveness and offered a modern approach to meaningful engagement and representation. The Leader acknowledged that the LGR process was not perfect and would require compromises but confirmed that, based on evidence from internal work and joint discussions with Kent council leaders, the single unitary model set out in the Strategic Business Case remained the most viable option for Kent and Medway.
5. Mr Whittle recorded his thanks to Mrs Dixon-Sherreard, the Policy and Strategy team, Kent Analytics, Financial Strategy, MRX, and other teams for their work in developing KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). He noted that the process, which began last December, had been complex and significant, given its long-term impact on services and residents.
6. He highlighted that KCC had met all Government expectations, working jointly with Kent council leaders and facilitating the LGR workstream. The Strategic Business Case was transparently cross-comparable with other options and based on a shared evidence base, including financial assessments. Members had been fully briefed throughout, with updates to the Cabinet Committee, party groups, and County Council.
7. Mr Whittle confirmed that Option 1A remained the most viable proposal, offering the lowest implementation cost, fastest payback (3.3 years), and highest cumulative savings (£457m over 10 years). He contrasted this with other options, which had significantly higher costs and longer payback periods.

He stressed that the financial case was particularly strong given current pressures and that the chosen option would affect the sector's long-term sustainability.

8. If approved, the business case would be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), after which the process would be led by Government through consultation, decision-making, and legislation. Mr Whittle suggested Cabinet consider sharing the business case with other departments, such as the Department for Education, Department for Transport, and the Home Office, due to potential wider impacts.
9. Mrs Dixon-Sherreard reported that the business case had been finalised for Cabinet approval following completion of resident and stakeholder engagement reports. She confirmed that headline findings remained consistent with interim results previously presented to the Cabinet Committee and County Council.
10. She explained that a late agreement among Kent and Medway councils on the data sets for population and electorate figures required recalculation of councillor numbers to ensure comparability across all proposals. This adjustment increased the number of councillors from 118 to 122 and resulted in a slight rise in predicted member allowance costs, which was reflected in the business case.
11. Sections identified as unclear during feedback had been clarified, and appendices collated to provide full transparency. These included the options appraisals, engagement reports, KPMG's financial assessment, and the proposed community engagement toolkit. Mrs Dixon-Sherreard noted that the designed version of the business case, published as a supplementary paper, was identical in content to the original version aside from formatting improvements.
12. Mrs Dixon-Sherreard expressed thanks to colleagues across multiple teams, including Policy and Strategy, Finance, MRX, Growth and Communities, Democratic Services, and Directorate Management Teams, for their contributions. It was noted that the development of the business case demonstrated KCC's capacity and capability to work collaboratively and respond effectively to complex challenges within tight timescales.
13. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) Thanks were expressed to the Leader and officers for the extensive work undertaken on the Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). He noted that the report was comprehensive and acknowledged that most Members had not sought LGR. Concerns however were raised that many members of the public were unaware of the process and its potential financial impact through council tax.
 - (b) There was a risk to critical services such as foster care and fire and rescue, as dividing these into multiple unitaries would dilute service quality and increase costs due to loss of economies of scale.

- (c) Support for Option 1A was reiterated as the least financially risky and most workable solution for Kent taxpayers, despite the view that LGR was unnecessary.
- (d) Option 1A reflected Kent's unique geography and social diversity, balanced strategic capability with local accountability, avoided disaggregation risks for services such as SEND and Adult Social Care, and maintained economies of scale. It was the least disruptive option and the most economically viable, with the lowest transition costs and fastest payback period.
- (e) With regard to addressing concerns about local democracy, it was explained that the proposal included strong community engagement processes and dedicated staff within each assembly area. Kent remained positive about future devolution, though no timetable had been provided by Government. The business case was bold, compelling, and focused on securing best value for Kent residents.
- (f) Mr Watts noted that Members, in considering the decision before them, had been given full opportunity to review and debate the proposals through Cabinet Committee discussions and County Council. He confirmed that concerns raised during the process were clearly set out in the proposed Record of Decision and had been considered by Members. Mr Watts placed on record that the decision had been made with due regard to those concerns, ensuring transparency for any future review of how the decision was reached.

14. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:

- (a) APPROVE the KCC Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway;
- (b) DELEGATE authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to take the required actions to submit the finalised Strategic Business Case submission to Government by the 28 November deadline.
- (c) DELEGATE authority to the Chief Executive to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to negotiating and entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision