

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of A meeting of the Cabinet held at Council Chamber on Thursday, 26th March, 2026.

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

OFFICERS: Dr Anjan Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Sarah Hammond (Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health), Amanda Beer (Chief Executive), Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Benjamin Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), Brendan Arnold (Corporate Director Finance) and Matthew Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste) and Georgina Little (Democratic Services)

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

**132. Apologies**  
(Item. 1)

No apologies were received.

**133. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda**  
(Item. 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

**134. Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2026**  
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

**135. Cabinet Member Updates**  
(Item. 4)

**1. Miss Diane Morton (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) Miss Morton provided an update on the recent meningitis outbreak in Canterbury. She reported that a major incident had been declared on 16 March following confirmed cases within the student population. She expressed deep sadness at the loss of two young people and placed on record the Council's heartfelt condolences to their families and friends.

Miss Morton formally thanked National Health Service staff for their rapid response in mobilising antibiotics and establishing vaccination sites, noting the professionalism and dedication shown throughout the incident. She also

highlighted her own involvement as a volunteer at a local medical practice. Recognition was given to the Council's Public Health teams for their resilience and tireless work under significant pressure, providing calm, expertise and reassurance during the outbreak.

She acknowledged the leadership of the Director of Public Health, Dr Ghosh, and thanked him, his team and the communications team for their continued efforts, noting that they had faced sustained pressure following multiple recent incidents. Miss Morton confirmed that the outbreak had moved into the recovery phase and that the Council would support ongoing investigations to ensure lessons learned were acted upon. She advised that a public helpline remained available for those seeking information between 09:00am and 5:00pm on 03442253861.

- (b) With regard to Health inequalities, Miss Morton reported that on 13 March she had attended the launch of the coastal Marmot region, alongside the Council Leader, Ms Kemkaran, Dr Ghosh and over 200 attendees. She described the event as well organised and noted the contribution of Sir Michael Marmot, whose work highlighted significant inequalities, including a life expectancy gap of up to nine years between communities. She noted that progress in life expectancy had stalled or reversed in some areas, reflecting the long-term impacts of austerity and reinforcing the importance of the Marmot approach.
- (c) Miss Morton welcomed the newly released Neighbourhood Health Framework, published as part of the National Health Service ten-year plan, and confirmed that it aligned closely with Marmot principles. She explained that this work would sit under the Health and Wellbeing Board, recently strengthened with support from the Local Government Association, and represented a significant shift towards preventative, community-based care. She highlighted mental health and social prescribing as priority areas and confirmed that a county-wide programme of engagement would ensure residents' needs shaped service delivery.
- (d) An overview was provided of recent visits to adult social care services. Miss Morton highlighted the Technology Enabled Living project at a local library as a practical example of supporting independence and embedding assistive technology into social work practice. She also congratulated the Technology Enabled Living Service on winning a National Social Worker of the Year Award.
- (e) Miss Morton noted further innovation through the use of digital assessment tools such as 'Magic Notes', which had received national recognition for improving assessment quality and reducing administrative time, allowing practitioners to focus more on direct support.
- (f) The Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Members for Adult Social Care had visited extra care housing facilities funded via private finance initiatives, including emerging plans on the Isle of Sheppey.
- (g) Miss Morton also praised the Council's Blue Badge team who had received 48,000 applications over the past year, and were leading the way for national improvements in system modernisation.

- (h) A visit was also undertaken to the National Autistic Society and one of its high-needs day centres, where Miss Morton met service users and their families and observed the support being provided.
- (i) Furthermore, Miss Morton reported that she had also visited a Safe Haven service, one of ten in operation across Kent. These services provided a free, non-clinical and welcoming environment for those aged 18 and over experiencing emotional distress and approaching a Mental Health crisis.
- (j) She had also visited a crisis recovery house operated by Hestia, which provided short-term residential support for adults experiencing a mental health crisis. She noted that much of this provision was commissioned by the NHS, with Kent County Council acting as a key partner, and commented that partnership relationships were currently stronger than she had previously experienced, with a clear commitment to joint working.
- (k) In addition, the Cabinet Member reported that she had met with therapy partners who had received a suicide prevention grant to deliver the Hard Hats Mind project. She explained that the project provided coaching support within construction environments, where suicide rates were known to be particularly high, and described the initiative as a positive and impactful example of targeted prevention work.
- (l) Finally, Miss Morton referred to the early findings recently shared by Dame Casey in relation to adult social care. She highlighted recommendations for greater support for people living with neurodegenerative conditions, the recognition of dementia as a clinical priority, and the establishment of a national safeguarding board, noting that work was already underway to progress these recommendations. She also reported that the wider assessment identified adult social care as underfunded, fragmented and lacking clear accountability, and that Dame Casey had described the current period as a critical moment for reflection and reform.

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

- (a) Miss Morton confirmed that further details on the Marmot Project would be provided at a later date, but there was a significant amount of work being undertaken.
- (b) In response to how communities were being better supported, Miss Morton confirmed that a recent planning application had been submitted for extra care housing, which was considered to be a positive development. It was also indicated that there was an aspiration to explore the potential for an intergenerational extra care housing model, which would incorporate and benefit multiple generations.
- (c) The Leader thanked Miss Morton for extending the Council's joint condolences to the families who had been tragically affected by the meningitis outbreak. The Leader also confirmed that she had written to Dr Gosh to formally express thanks for his hard work, noting that he had

dealt with a succession of crises over the course of the year and had done so with great professionalism

**2. Mr Paul Webb (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) Mr Webb began by providing an update on the library service. He reported that he had recently attended the opening of the Sittingbourne Library alongside Mrs Palmer. Members were informed that the Sittingbourne Library was one of seven libraries being co-located with Adult Social Care services, the Technology Enhanced Lives Services (TELS) unit, and Family Hub services. Mr Webb described the refurbishment as an impressive renovation and encouraged Members and the public to visit the facility.
- (b) Mr Webb highlighted that it was the National Year of Reading. He confirmed his intention to personally visit the library to participate and encouraged residents to engage with their local libraries as part of the national campaign. He emphasised the positive impact of encouraging reading across communities.
- (c) Members were advised that seven libraries in total were being refurbished under this model, with several already reopened. These included Temple Hill, Cranbrook, Stanhope, and Sittingbourne libraries. Mr Webb confirmed that further libraries at Queenborough, Cliftonville, and Sevenoaks were scheduled to open in the coming weeks. He expressed satisfaction with the progress of the programme and noted that additional locations were also being explored, highlighting the clear benefits to local communities.
- (d) Mr Webb informed Members that Dover Library had been shortlisted for the South East Library of the Year award. He stated that the development would be closely monitored and that Members would be kept informed of the outcome.
- (e) The Cabinet Member provided an update on Kent Scientific Services. It was reported that the service continued to undertake testing of food and related products on behalf of local authorities. This work had identified several safety-critical issues, including alcoholic drinks containing methanol, undeclared allergens, and food supplements found to contain an excessive level of mercury. It was noted that Kent Scientific Services worked daily to keep people safe, not only within Kent but nationally. Members were advised that many of these unsafe products entered the country through ports. The Cabinet Member highlighted that this work was largely undertaken behind the scenes and paid tribute to the service, describing the team as vital to the portfolio.
- (f) The Cabinet Member highlighted the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail, noting its relevance to the administration's focus on coastal communities and the coastal economy. Members were informed that the south-east section of the route, running from London to Brighton, was now available on Google Maps and AllTrails. It was explained that the project, funded by a 'Defra Access for All' grant, aimed to encourage

use of coastal pathways by enabling people to check accessibility and plan visits from home. The Cabinet Member noted that the path followed much of the Kent coastline and encouraged Members and the public to explore it.

- (g) An update was provided on the work of Trading Standards, noting that the service remained consistently busy and vigilant. It was reported that two fully funded Trading Standards Officers were now based at the Port of Dover, with funding provided by central government in recognition of the importance and effectiveness of the work undertaken there. Members were advised that a significant proportion of goods entering the country passed through the Port of Dover, including a high volume of illegal items, and that officers were actively engaged in tackling this.
- (h) It was further reported that Trading Standards had recently worked in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police, and the Independent British Vape Trade Association to launch the local Vape Action Scheme in Maidstone, with the initiative also being rolled out across other towns in the county. The scheme aimed to ensure that only safe and legal vaping products were sold and that sales to children were prevented. The Cabinet Member noted growing concern about illegal vapes nationally and reiterated that many of these products entered the country through the Port of Dover.
- (i) The Cabinet Member commended the Trading Standards team for their work, highlighting that the additional centrally funded officers had significantly strengthened capacity and helped manage the increasing caseload, alongside the continued use of technological solutions.
- (j) It was reported that TELS drop-in centres were now operational within libraries, including at Broadstairs, and that plans were in place to roll the service out to additional library locations across the county, including alongside Family Hub services. Satisfaction was expressed with the level of activity being delivered across the portfolio, much of which took place behind the scenes and was communicated through newsletters and library updates.
- (k) The Cabinet Member also highlighted Active Kent and Medway, and emphasised the importance of supporting people of all ages to remain active and mobile for long-term health and wellbeing. Pride was expressed in the portfolio's ability to both encourage participation and fund initiatives that helped individuals remain fitter and stronger throughout their lives.

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

- (a) In response to a question regarding the future of libraries, the Cabinet Member confirmed that proposals inherited from the previous administration to close a significant number of libraries were no longer being pursued. It was stated that an early decision had been taken to stop plans to close a minimum of 34 libraries and instead assess each facility on a case-by-case basis, with a focus on improvement and

expansion where possible. The Cabinet Member highlighted the success of co-located community-based models, including partnerships with Family Hub services, and emphasised that libraries remained central to community life as free, accessible spaces across Kent's diverse geography. The interdependency between libraries and related services, such as community wardens, was also noted, and the Cabinet Member reaffirmed the administration's commitment to maintaining and strengthening these services. The Leader also expressed the importance of safeguarding libraries, as they remained vital to community needs.

**3. Mr Paul King (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) An update was provided on tree-planting activity, noting the success of planting £1.6m trees. It was reported that during the most recent planting season, around 1,000 trees had been planted, exceeding the target, and that the programme focused on disease-resistant species. Thanks were extended to volunteers, Network Rail and the Tree Council for their support.
- (b) On waste management, confirmation was provided that the Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy had recently been refreshed to align with new legislation. This work had been undertaken in collaboration with district councils. The Cabinet Member highlighted ongoing efforts to encourage behaviour change, including the separation of food waste and correct recycling, noting both environmental and financial benefits.
- (c) Members were informed that accessibility within country parks remained a priority. The Cabinet Member confirmed that they would be attending the opening of new Changing Places toilet facilities at Shorne Woods Country Park. It was also reported that, in their role as Chair of the Kent Nature Partnership, work had progressed on the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy, with delivery work due to commence following an upcoming meeting.
- (d) The Cabinet Member also updated Members on work relating to No Use Empty (NUE), noting that a recent presentation had been made to Members and that a stakeholder event was scheduled for 1 June. It was reported that district councils, landlords and developers had been invited, and that discussions were underway regarding potential national alignment, comparable to similar arrangements in Scotland and Wales.
- (e) Finally, the Cabinet Member provided an update on coastal regeneration. It was noted that Kent's extensive coastline presented both opportunities and challenges, and that work was underway to develop a Coastal Regeneration Strategy. The strategy aimed to attract investment, support local jobs and skills, and deliver sustainable regeneration shaped by local communities. Members were advised that this work cut across multiple Cabinet portfolios and aligned with a number of existing strategies, including skills, health, employment and economic planning initiatives. Ongoing engagement with district councils and coastal leaders was

confirmed, with further meetings planned to support the development of the strategy.

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

(a) In response to a question on tree planting and volunteer involvement, the Cabinet Member explained that trees were planted across a range of locations, including disused landfill sites, with plans in place to repurpose some sites into environmental assets. It was also confirmed that tree planting formed part of new housing and highway developments, including recent schemes. The Cabinet Member acknowledged interest from Members and residents in volunteering and confirmed that further information would be shared to allow wider participation when planting seasons resumed. It was noted that tree planting primarily took place during the autumn and winter months.

**4. Mr David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special projects) provided an update on the following:**

(a) The Cabinet Member reported positive progress across health, employment and skills. An employment and skills summit held in Ashford brought together approximately 100 partners to support delivery of the Kent and Medway Working Plan, with a focus on translating strategy into action by aligning health, skills and employment pathways to support people into work.

(b) Members were updated on the Skills Bootcamps programme, which continued to perform strongly. Wave 6 was being delivered across key sectors including construction, creative industries, early years, health and retail, with over 600 places created. It was reported that 350 learners had enrolled, 170 had completed training, and 90 had already progressed into employment or improved roles. Learner satisfaction stood at 98%, with all participants reporting improved skills and employment prospects. It was noted that Wave 7 would proceed with reduced funding, delivering at least 400 places and expanding into the agricultural sector.

(c) The Connect to Work programme was exceeding targets for sustained employment and that additional providers would join the programme from April to strengthen delivery. At a strategic level, the Local Growth Plan had identified four priority sectors: agri-food and agri-tech, transport and logistics, digital technology, and energy, to support evidence-based investment cases to government.

(d) Further updates included engagement with Members of Parliament, contributions to agri-tech funding discussions with research and academic partners, and refreshed work on tackling young people not in education, employment or training. As a result, the Local Skills Improvement Plan had been updated and was due for publication in early summer

- (e) On business support, the Kent and Medway Growth Hub had supported 1,343 businesses during the year through advice, workshops and tailored support.
- (f) The Kent and Medway Business Fund had approved 80 loans totalling £9.75 million, supporting a wide range of businesses across the county. Members were also advised that the KCC Supplier Day continued to support businesses to access public sector procurement opportunities.
- (g) Tourism and investment activity was also highlighted. Visit Kent had launched a new campaign promoting coastal and well-connected rail destinations, with further campaigns planned. Invest Kent continued to develop a strong inward investment proposition ahead of May, and international engagement was underway to strengthen cross-channel partnerships.
- (h) Mr Wimble advised that he would be attending the Straits Committee meeting in Austin to strengthen cross-channel collaboration with partner regions in Belgium, France and the Netherlands.
- (i) An update was provided on activity relating to nuclear regeneration at Dungeness. Following engagement at Nuclear Week in Parliament, discussions with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and other stakeholders were reported to be progressing positively, including proposals for a decommissioning centre of excellence. Members were informed that a non-political nuclear task force had been established, involving the local Member of Parliament and district council leadership. It was confirmed that the task force had already met in Westminster, with further discussions scheduled, and that this work represented a long-term opportunity to support skilled employment and economic growth.
- (j) The Cabinet Member paid tribute to David Godfrey, recognising his many years of dedicated service to the Council and his significant contribution to work at Dungeness. It was noted that he was highly regarded by colleagues and would be greatly missed.
- (k) In conclusion, the Cabinet Member summarised that the portfolio was delivering tangible outcomes by supporting employment, assisting businesses, targeting key growth sectors and progressing major strategic initiatives. It was further noted that recent activity included participation in interviews for the Kent and Medway Enterprise Partnership and engagement at the House of Commons on the Lower Thames Crossing, where continued positive partnership working with Kent County Council had been acknowledged.

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

- (a) Members echoed the tribute paid to David Godfrey and formally recognised his significant contribution to the portfolio.
- (b) The Cabinet Member also responded to comments regarding nuclear matters, acknowledging remarks made about increased

understanding and reassurance around nuclear safety and its role in future energy and economic development.

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

- (a) The Cabinet Member provided an update on developments within education, noting that a period of significant change was underway. It was reported that the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) White Paper reforms for 2026 remained subject to ongoing consultation until May, with final outcomes not yet confirmed. Despite this, a substantial programme of preparatory work was underway within the Council to ensure readiness once the Government's final proposals were published.
- (b) Members were informed that the Cabinet Member had visited a wide range of schools across the county, including primary, secondary and special schools and units. These visits had focused on understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by schools, gathering views on the proposed reforms, and strengthening collaboration between schools, officers and the wider education sector.
- (c) An update was also provided on secondary school admissions. The Cabinet Member reported that National Offer Day took place on 2 March, with strong outcomes achieved. It was confirmed that 96% of applicants were offered at least one of their four preferences, 79% received their first preference, and 304 more children were placed in a preferred school compared with the previous year. Members were advised that the acceptance deadline was 16 March, second-round offers would be issued on 23 April 2026, and that waiting lists and appeals remained open. Families were encouraged to contact KCC or their local councillor for advice and support where needed.
- (d) Recent visits had been made to teams working behind the scenes, including the in-year admissions team, which supported families moving into Kent or between districts outside the normal annual admissions cycle. Members were informed that this team was working with schools to improve efficiency, strengthen data collection, and provide a more accurate picture of pupil movement, which was essential for future capacity planning, particularly in light of population change and inward migration.
- (e) Members were also informed of wider transformation activity within the service, including work on the Synergy system to improve communication as part of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process. It was noted that the 0-6 improvement process had been successfully piloted and rolled out across the county, and that work was now progressing on improvements to the 7-20 week process. The Cabinet Member highlighted that while much of this work was not visible to the public, it was expected to lead to improved outcomes over time.
- (f) The Cabinet Member provided an update on work supporting children who were not currently in education. It was noted that a significant

number of children nationally, and approximately 1,700 within Kent, were not accessing education for a variety of reasons. Members were informed that specialist teams were working through structured processes to re-engage these children in appropriate education or, where necessary, to provide support to families. The Cabinet Member explained that forthcoming Government reforms, including those set out in the White Paper, would be considered carefully to ensure children were not missing out on education where attendance or alternative provision was appropriate.

- (g) Members were also updated on recent engagement with schools involved in a pilot project focused on inclusion. The Cabinet Member reported attending presentations from schools participating in the PINS (Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools) pilot, operating in Maidstone and Swale in partnership with Medway. The pilot focused on supporting children with neurodivergent needs, including autism and ADHD, within mainstream settings by building on existing good practice. It was noted that the project was highly collaborative and data-led, with evidence being gathered to inform future approaches. The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of analysing this data and exploring digital solutions to support schools, with the aim of improving outcomes and ensuring all children received the education they deserved.
- (h) The White Paper, 'Every Child achieving and thriving', set out a significant system reform focused on early intervention and mainstream inclusion and the document clearly outlined non-negotiable expectations for local authorities. It was confirmed that the Council was required to develop a formal plan to implement system reform, with a clear shift towards mainstream inclusion as the default approach, rather than reliance on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and specialist provision. This would require close partnership working with the education sector to strengthen capacity, leadership and training, and to enable schools to meet the majority of needs locally, while reducing dependence on costly and distant specialist placements. The Cabinet Member further explained that the reforms would involve a shift in investment and decision-making into mainstream provision. Although a ministerial letter had been received setting out these expectations, Members were advised that there was currently no clarity regarding the level or distribution of future funding, nor whether this would meet rising demand alongside existing statutory pressures. It was emphasised that the Council would need to continue meeting its statutory duties while preparing to implement the new system. Mrs Fordham confirmed that engagement with schools and partners was progressing positively and welcomed continued involvement from councillors and Members of Parliament to support collaboration and delivery as plans were developed.

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

- (a) In response to comments regarding young people not in education, employment or training, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the scale and urgency of the issue and confirmed that work was already

underway to address it. Members were advised that Kent was delivering a “Pathways for All” approach, which focused on supporting young people in their final years of school to identify clear and appropriate routes into education, training or employment. This included close collaboration between schools, sixth forms and colleges to shape provision at Level 1 and Level 2, including vocational options, based on local need. It was explained that the Council’s role was to ensure sufficient capacity across the system rather than directly commissioning provision, supported by detailed data collection and analysis. While national reforms and course changes were still evolving, work was progressing to strengthen the Council’s involvement in supporting capacity where gaps existed, alongside improved communication with Members and partners.

(b) Mrs Fordham also acknowledged and welcomed comments praising the work of officers and schools, particularly in relation to improvements in admissions outcomes compared with the previous year. Thanks were expressed for the recognition of the progress made, and appreciation was conveyed to officers and partners for their continued efforts.

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

(a) It was noted that while external visits since the previous meeting had been limited, regular meetings had taken place with Service Directors and colleagues, with significant work progressing behind the scenes at both planning and delivery stages. Preparations were also underway for visits to Family Hubs with divisional members to be invited.

(b) The Best Start in Life programme was due to launch on 31 March through Family Hub provision. The Cabinet Member expressed thanks to the wider team for their work in developing the programme and reported attending a recent Family Hub staff conference, where staff commitment and high-quality practice were evident. Attendance at a Local Government Association training event in Coventry was also referenced, with Mrs Palmer noting that Kent County Council was well advanced nationally in preparing for Best Start in Life delivery.

(c) Mrs Palmer had recently attended the reopening of Sittingbourne Library alongside the Cabinet Member for Libraries and the Chairman of KCC. It was reported that the library would include a Family Hub, expected to open later in April, as well as space for community activity, enhancing accessibility for residents.

(d) Members were also informed that online safety training for parents had been launched through the Learning Hub to support children’s safety online.

(e) Improvements had been made with inter-agency working with the police. It was confirmed that following ongoing challenges regarding incomplete information sharing, police IT systems had been updated to require key child-centred information before reports could be submitted. This

improvement was welcomed ahead of an upcoming Youth Justice inspection.

- (f) Refurbishment works were underway at two children's homes, with additional properties being sought. Renovation works at another children's home were nearing completion, with registration inspections expected shortly.
- (g) An update was also provided on Short Breaks provision, noting efficiency savings achieved through a revised needs-based approach, aimed at reducing waiting times while expanding support for families of disabled children.
- (h) Mrs Palmer advised that ongoing support continued for more than 9,000 young carers across Kent, with further updates to be provided as developments progressed.

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

- (a) The Cabinet Member outlined his ambition to move away from short-term, reactive management of Kent's highway network and towards a long-term, planned approach that improved safety, resilience and suitability for the needs of Kent's communities and economy.
- (b) One of the main priorities was the mobilisation of the new highways maintenance contract, due to go live in May. It was emphasised that this change was not simply a replacement of providers, but a shift in approach, with greater emphasis on getting work right first time, clearer accountability, and an asset-led model that improved understanding of the condition of the highway network. The Cabinet Member stated that a key objective was a smooth transition, with effective oversight and minimal disruption to residents.
- (c) An update was provided on the refresh of the Highways Asset Management Plan. The Cabinet Member explained that this would take account of current and future pressures facing the network and support a move away from short-term fixes towards risk-based, evidence-driven decision making. This approach was intended to enable more transparent and informed discussions on funding and long-term sustainability at both local and national levels.
- (d) Mr Osborne reaffirmed his commitment to road safety through the Vision Zero approach, with the aim of eliminating deaths and serious injuries on Kent's roads. Members were advised that work was underway on the next five-year delivery plan, which would align with the forthcoming National Road Safety Strategy and adopt a whole-system approach encompassing engineering, behaviour, enforcement and partnership working. The wider benefits to public health, active travel and climate resilience were also highlighted.

- (e) It was noted that the shift to multi-year funding settlements from the Department for Transport provided greater certainty and improved opportunities for forward planning. It was emphasised that demonstrating strong delivery and value for money was essential to securing future funding.
- (f) Finally, the Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of strengthening drainage and flood resilience through a new capital works framework. The focus would be on moving away from reactive responses towards a planned, partnership-based approach, including closer working with organisations such as Southern Water. Improved understanding of drainage assets and delivery of larger-scale schemes was identified as key to addressing and managing the impact of climate change and supporting more sustainable, nature-based solutions.
- (g) Mr Osborne concluded by stating that these priorities set a clear direction for the Highways and Transport service. The focus would remain on becoming more forward-looking, resilient and better prepared for future challenges, while continuing to deliver reliable day-to-day services for residents with fewer unexpected issues and emergencies.

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

- (a) The Cabinet Member acknowledged the comments regarding pothole repairs and expressed appreciation for the positive feedback given to the highways team, in recognition that the work was being delivered within a limited budget and that, despite financial constraints, the improvements were visible and valued by residents.
- (b) In response to a question regarding confidence in the new Highways Term Maintenance Contract commencing on 1 May, the Cabinet Member stated that he was very optimistic about the contract and its potential to improve service delivery. Mr Osborne explained that the contract would be formally launched on 1 May at the Royal British Legion in Aylesford and confirmed that invitations would be extended to Members who wished to attend. He emphasised that the new arrangements represented a significant step forward for highways maintenance and would bring meaningful improvements
- (c) Addressing concerns about the durability of pothole repairs, the Cabinet Member confirmed that contractors were required to guarantee their work. He explained that where repairs failed or were deemed not fit for purpose, remedial works would be carried out under the terms of the contract at no additional cost. The Cabinet Member confirmed that a two-year guarantee applied to all works delivered under the highways contracts.
- (d) The Cabinet Member outlined that highways maintenance was delivered through two complementary contractual arrangements: the main Highways Term Maintenance Contract with Ringway, and a Local Highways Maintenance Contract. He advised that four new local contractors had been appointed under the latter and were due to

commence work shortly. These arrangements were supported by Department for Transport funding, including funding allocated through the local pothole plan. The Cabinet Member highlighted the benefit of using local contractors, noting their familiarity with local road networks and communities, which would contribute to more responsive and effective maintenance delivery.

**8. Mr Chris Hespe (Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency) provided an update on the following:**

- (a) Mr Hespe, provided an update on the future direction of the DOLGE Programme, confirming that a new approach and ways of working were being developed, building on the successes reported to Full Council in February. He advised that a formal strategy was in preparation, which would set out priorities and delivery methods and would be brought to Members for consideration in due course.
- (b) Mr Hespe further advised that an incentivisation scheme was being developed to encourage staff to bring forward ideas for income generation and cost reduction, with recognition for successful proposals. In addition, funding was being secured to support directorate income-generation projects requiring initial investment. He thanked the Chief Executive for her support and leadership in championing this work and the authority's staff.
- (c) The Cabinet Member outlined progress in embedding a more commercial approach across the County Council and in supporting suppliers to deliver higher-quality outcomes. He reported on a supplier engagement event held on 27 January, which attracted significant interest, with 700 applications and 300 businesses attending, primarily Kent-based SMEs and VCSEs. Feedback from attendees had been very positive. He explained that the event focused on information sharing, developing a supplier network, and enhancing social value, noting that the Council currently spent approximately £1.47bn per annum through third-party contracts. The event arose directly from the Council's first Commercial Strategy, and thanks were extended to the procurement team and Deputy Cabinet Member, Mr Chamberlain.
- (d) Mr Hespe advised that key performance and incentive measures were being introduced to support commercial activity, with a particular focus on Kent-based SMEs and VCSEs being supported to compete for and win contracts. The impact of this work on Kent businesses would be measured. He also thanked the team and the administration for their work supporting these initiatives.
- (e) In relation to culture and value for money, the Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of challenging service delivery assumptions across the authority. He referenced attendance at a research meeting with Adult Social Care concerning a contract valued at approximately £12m per annum, where principles such as necessity of service provision, alternative delivery models, and efficiency were being actively considered. He commended Adult Social Care and Public Health staff for

embracing these principles and for their focus on managing spend effectively.

- (f) Finally, Mr Hespe advised that a number of innovative income-generation opportunities were currently being explored. While details were not shared at this stage, he confirmed that further updates would be provided as the work progressed.

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

- (a) The Leader expressed thanks to Mr Chamberlain for the successful delivery of the Kent Supply Day.
- (b) Mr Hespe emphasised that the objectives of the emerging strategy were not focused on incremental reductions or blunt cost-cutting measures. Instead, he confirmed that a collaborative and inclusive approach was being adopted, which represented a key principle of the strategy currently in development. He further stressed that this work was intended to be a council-wide endeavour, extending beyond a small number of Members and involving the authority as a whole to ensure collective ownership and effective delivery.

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

- (a) The Deputy Leader formally welcomed Mr Brendan Arnold to the authority in his role as the new Section 151 Officer. He advised that he had held an initial meeting with Mr Arnold and that early discussions indicated a shared understanding and alignment on the financial way forward. Mr Collins stated that he looked forward to working closely with him.
- (b) Mr Collins also placed on record his sincere thanks to Mr Dave Shipton and Ms Cath Head for undertaking the Section 151 responsibilities on an interim basis prior to Mr Arnold's appointment. He acknowledged that the budget presented to Members had been largely their work and noted that the administration's progress would not have been possible without their cooperation and support.
- (c) Reflecting on the end of the Council's first full financial year under the current administration, Mr Collins described it as a challenging and at times concerning period, particularly during late autumn when forecasts indicated a potential revenue overspend of up to £46.5m. He advised that, through strong officer collaboration and the collective efforts of Cabinet Members, a clearer understanding of portfolios had been established over the past 11 months, enabling better financial control. As a result, the latest predicted overspend had reduced to £26m. While noting that the final position would depend on the last month of the financial year, he expressed cautious optimism that the overspend would be contained or potentially reduced further.
- (d) Looking ahead, Mr Collins commented on improving financial resilience and highlighted a strong year in relation to infrastructure and asset

disposals. He reported that disposal targets of £12m had been significantly exceeded, delivering financial benefits that would support the Council's position in the forthcoming financial year.

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

- (a) The Deputy Leader thanked Members for their supportive comments and acknowledged the significant pressures faced by Members and officers over the past year, including heightened media scrutiny. He reflected on the challenges of taking on portfolios without full visibility of the scale of the task and commended the strong collaborative working that had developed across the Council. He expressed pride in the collective efforts of Members and officers and noted that the positive outcomes of this work were now beginning to be realised.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

**136. 26/00006 - Late changes to the 2026-27 Revenue Budget and 2026-29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)**  
*(Item. 5)*

*Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) and Brendan Arnold (Corporate Director of Finance and S151 Officer) were in attendance for this item.*

1. The Deputy Leader, Mr Collins, reported that the final Local Government Finance Settlement was published on 9 February and was therefore not included in the budget approved by County Council on 12 February. Final business rates estimates were also unavailable at that time. Council had agreed that the resulting changes should be reported to and approved by Cabinet.

He advised that the final settlement increased the net revenue budget by £6.7m (0.4%), with a further £0.3m reduction arising from final business rates. This resulted in a revised net revenue budget for 2026–27 of £1,654.5m, compared to £1,648.1m previously approved.

Mr Collins explained that corrections to business rates pooling arrangements had increased KCC's Revenue Support Grant by £6.57m in 2026–27 and £3.32m in 2027–28. As this funding was transitional, it was proposed that the additional sums be transferred to reserves.

He further reported the introduction of a new High Needs Stability Grant, covering 90% of accumulated Special Educational Needs deficits up to March 2026, with KCC's allocation expected in the autumn. He commented that those authorities like Kent, that were previously part of the DfE Safety Valve Programme would not be penalised through the new grant and that the residual balances from the KCC contributions were proposed to be held in an earmarked Special Educational Needs reserve pending further clarification from Government on how deficits accrued after March 2026 would be managed when the current statutory override expired. Despite this mitigation, Mr Collins cautioned that forecast high needs deficits beyond 2026–27 could still expose the Council to financial risk in excess of £180m, posing a significant ongoing risk to financial sustainability.

Mr Collins advised that a one-off £1,000 increase in the amount for individual Member grants was possible within 2026-27 budget following the Council decision on increase in Member allowances.

2. Mr Shipton reminded Cabinet of the business rates retention system, noting that it was often overlooked. He explained that fifty percent of locally raised business rates were retained by local government, with the remaining fifty percent returned to central government to fund grants.

He clarified that authorities only retained a share of any local growth in the business rate taxbase above an agreed baseline. This growth was generated through new businesses or changes of use, and this excluded inflationary increases and business rate revaluations.

Mr Shipton advised that a levy continued to apply to business rate growth following the Fair Funding reset, although this was now managed through tiered arrangements. He confirmed that there was no requirement to enter a business rates pool for the 2026–27 financial year, but noted that pooling could be reconsidered in future if parts of the county experienced high growth as a pool would enable a greater proportion of business rate income to be retained locally.

3. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:
  - a) APPROVE the revised net revenue budget for 2026-27 of £1,654.5m [one thousand, six hundred and fifty-four million, five hundred thousand pounds], arising from the final funding announcements.
  - b) APPROVE that the increase in the net budget is reflected in increased spending where funding is from a consolidated grant (£115k [one hundred and fifteen thousand pounds] for Domestic Abuse and £0.3k [three hundred pounds] for Crisis and Resilience), with the transitional changes to the Revenue Support Grant of £6,570k [six thousand, five hundred and seventy thousand pounds] transferred to reserves.
  - c) APPROVE the reduction in retained business rates income from renewable energy £169.6k [one hundred and sixty-nine thousand, six hundred pounds] and collection fund deficit of £151.7k are balanced with a drawdown of £321.3k [three hundred and twenty-one thousand, three hundred pounds] from the local taxation reserve.
  - d) APPROVE the technical changes to transfer the residual balance of the £61.1m [sixty-one million, one hundred thousand pounds] previous years' contributions and £20.2m [twenty million, two hundred thousand pounds] of future years' KCC Safety Valve contributions to a new earmarked SEND reserve. This follows the government's announcement that the Safety Valve Programme will cease on 1st April 2026 as a result of the introduction of the new High Needs Sustainability Grant.
  - e) APPROVE the one-off increase in member community grants for 2026-27 to £4,600 [four thousand six hundred pounds] per member.

- f) NOTE the other late changes to the specific grants and minor technical changes as reflected in the updated High level 2026-27 Budget & 2026-29 Medium Term Financial Plan at appendix A and Key Service analysis at appendix B to the Cabinet report.
- g) NOTE the impact of these late changes on the S25 assurance as shown in section 6 of the Cabinet report

**137. Quarterly Performance Report - Quarter 3 - 2025-2026**  
*(Item. 6)*

*Matthew Wagner (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Wagner outlined the report for Quarter 3 (Q3, 2025/26) which covered the period up until December 2025. Of the 39 KPIs reported, 18 were rated Green (2 fewer than the previous quarter) 15 were rated Amber (one more than the previous quarter) and 6 were rated Red (one more than the previous quarter). With regards to Direction of Travel, 6 indicators showed a positive trend, 29 were stable or with no clear trend, and 4 showed a negative trend. Mr Wagner addressed the KPIs that were rated RED and the mitigating actions for these were set out in the report. In comparison to the most recent six quarters, more indicators showed a positive direction of travel than a negative one, indicating overall stabilisation and improvement in performance over time.
2. A full review of KPIs has been undertaken across Kent County Council as part of preparation for 2026/27 (as detailed in Appendix 2); 7 indicators were proposed for removal and 11 new indicators were proposed for addition which represented a net increase of 4 indicators.
3. A new Commercial and Procurement section had been introduced to the Quarterly Performance Report, with three new KPIs, which aimed to provide greater transparency and scrutiny around commercial activity and the value for money being achieved.
4. Work was also underway to review how far KCC's indicators aligned with the new Local Outcomes Framework recently announced by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This framework included around 130 national metrics intended to measure progress across government priority areas. While KCC did not need to align fully, given that the Council already held data not captured nationally, officers were assessing overlap and gaps. A further report on this alignment would be brought to the Policy & Resources Cabinet Committee in July.
5. Mr Watts (Deputy Chief Executive) highlighted that performance against Fol and SAR indicators had improved despite a continued increase in volume and complexity of requests. The work that had been undertaken to improve SAR performance was now starting to show results. Mr Wagner also commented that whilst the Fol volumes had also increased, improved performance has been achieved through sustained effort from service teams.

6. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - (a) In response to whether the detail had been published on the Local Outcomes Framework, Mr Wagner confirmed that the proposed metrics were published in mid-February, noting that some measures were still in development, particularly where new or non-standard datasets were required. The intention was to draw as far as possible on existing national statistics and data KCC already reported on.
  - (b) With regard to whether there would be an additional burden on the organisation, given the scale of the proposed metrics, Mr Wagner confirmed that while much of the framework drew on existing data, there was still uncertainty around whether some new measures could create additional reporting pressures. This would only become clear once final requirements were confirmed.
7. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to note the Quarter 3 Performance Report and the actions being taken to address areas where performance is not as targeted, and the proposed indicators for 2026/27