

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 13 November 2025

PRESENT: Mr C Hespe (Chairman), Mr P Chamberlain (Vice-Chair), Mr A Brady, Mr D Burns, Mr W Chapman, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Finch, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr H Rayner and Mr N Wibberley

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr J Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance), Ms C Maynard (Chief Procurement Officer), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr M Bridger (Commissioning Standards Programme Manager), Mr H D'Alton (Programme Manager (Strategic Programmes)), Ms R Rhodes (Commercial Risk and Responsible Procurement Lead), Ms J Taylor (Head of Capital) and Ms P Edwards (Commercial Policy and Governance Lead)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

24. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Evans.

25. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2025

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the open and exempt minutes of the meeting on 10 September were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

27. 25/00083 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Commercial Strategy for 2026-2028

(Item 5)

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader), Mr Paul Chamberlain (Deputy Cabinet Member for Corporate and Traded Services) and Mrs Clare Maynard (Chief Procurement Officer) introduced the item and the key decision to adopt KCC's Commercial Strategy for 2026-2028. The strategy set out a Council-wide framework for delivering best value through procurement and contract management. Mrs Maynard highlighted that a delegation to the Chief Procurement Officer to approve the supporting documents - Responsible

Procurement Charter and Contract Management Policy – would be included within the proposed key decision.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - a) The lack of public consultation that had taken place or was planned was raised as a concern, and it was queried how third party spend with Kent businesses could be increased (including the setting of targets and measures to simplify processes for local providers). Officers explained that efforts were being made to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Kent suppliers through contract lotting, engagement events, and simplified processes, while maintaining best value. Mr Chamberlain confirmed plans to provide Members with a toolkit to engage SMEs locally.
 - b) More detail in relation to the proposed social value policy was requested to ensure it delivered meaningful environmental, employment and skills benefits. Officers explained that social value was a statutory requirement under the new Procurement Act, and a dedicated policy with weightings and evaluation criteria would be brought to a future Cabinet Committee meeting.
 - c) Officers explained that the strategy was high-level and supported by detailed implementation plans, timetables, and success measures. The approach aimed to move procurement beyond a transactional process to one that added value through early engagement, supply chain development, and alignment with local priorities.
 - d) The three-year timeframe reflected a structured period for delivering measurable outcomes. It was agreed that setting a target for Kent-based spend would be considered, and officers confirmed that supporting local suppliers was a priority within the Council's Strategic Statement.
 - e) A Member requested that all political groups be represented on the Contract Management Review Group. The Chairman advised that concerns about proportionality and representation on the Contract Management Review Group should be raised in writing.
 - f) Mrs Maynard clarified that the term "smarter" referred both to adopting a more strategic approach to procurement and to setting SMART targets. She emphasised that the strategy was supported by performance indicators to ensure accountability.
 - g) The positive impact of recent changes to the Procurement Act was highlighted and Members welcomed the increased focus on social value, SMEs, and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE), stressing the importance of performance indicators and transparency for residents.
 - h) Asked about training plans, rollout across directorates, and monitoring, Mrs Maynard confirmed that user voices were already included in some evaluation processes and reiterated the importance of tracking data to demonstrate investment in Kent. Regarding training, Mrs Maynard outlined existing measures such as Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) qualifications for procurement staff, policy-based training on spending council funds, system training, and contract management training.
3. The Chairman thanked officers for their work and highlighted the upcoming supplier engagement event on 27 January 2026.

4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
- (a) Approve the adoption and implementation of the Kent County Council Commercial Strategy 2026-2028.
 - (b) Delegate authority to the Chief Procurement Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to refresh and/or make non-substantial revisions to the strategy where changes do not require additional governance.
 - (c) Delegate authority to the Chief Procurement Officer to take relevant actions, including but not limited to, entering into and finalising the terms of relevant contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary, to implement the above decision.
 - (d) Delegate authority to the Chief Procurement Officer to approve the Responsible Procurement Charter and Contract Management Policy as supporting documents to the Commercial Strategy.

28. Commercial and Procurement Performance Report (Quarter 1 and Quarter 2, 2025/2026)
(Item 6)

1. Mr Collins and Mrs Maynard introduced the item which detailed the work of the Commercial and Procurement Division, including value added, savings achieved, and progress on policies and procedures. Mrs Maynard emphasised that the achievements represented a whole-Council effort and clarified that reported savings were already captured within directorate budgets to avoid double counting.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) Regarding the graph at paragraph 3.1 of the report, Mrs Maynard confirmed that Q1 and Q2 figures were actuals, while Q3 and Q4 were projections based on existing contracts, and that the grey line represented projected spend for the 2026–27 financial year.
 - (b) A Member asked how the new strategy would reduce subcontracting and enable direct engagement with suppliers. Mrs Maynard responded that subcontracting would remain necessary in some cases but would reduce as more contracts were lotted and structured to support smaller providers. It was noted that reducing subcontracting aligned with the strategy's focus on SMEs and VCSEs.
 - (c) On retrospective waivers, Mrs Maynard explained that the recent increase reflected greater engagement and improved visibility through the new Oracle system, allowing better compliance monitoring and training.
 - (d) Officers confirmed that the Commercial Procurement Oversight Board was an officer-only body chaired by Mrs Maynard, with representation from finance, risk, legal, and relevant directorates.
 - (e) Asked about modern slavery and fraud within supply chains Officers outlined ongoing work based on the Home Office Procurement Pilots Report, including a Serious and Organised Crime Working Group, risk assessments, and guidance for proportionate approaches, with plans to extend this to bribery, fraud, and corruption.

- (f) A Member asked whether rescinding the climate emergency declaration reduced barriers for small businesses while maintaining proportionate environmental standards. Mr Chamberlain responded that the intention was to lower entry barriers for SMEs without removing environmental considerations.

3. RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee note the report.

29. Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) - Strategy, Remit, Governance & Decision-Making Update
(Item 7)

1. Mr Matthew Fraser Moat (Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency) introduced the report on the Department of Local Government Efficiency's (DOLGE) strategy, remit, governance, and decision-making. He explained that DOLGE aimed to embed a more commercial approach across KCC operations and referred to the adoption of the new Commercial Strategy, cultural change initiatives, revised business processes, and new internal training courses for staff involved in procurement. These measures were expected to deliver efficiencies and savings during the 2026–27 financial year. He noted that decisions affecting the 2025–26 financial year remained the responsibility of Cabinet.
2. The Chairman emphasised that the report set out the framework rather than specific savings and confirmed that DOLGE would contribute to budget setting and medium-term financial planning.
3. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - a) Some Members expressed concern that the report lacked detail, requesting more information on immediate savings, future cost avoidance, and areas identified for deep dives. Mr Collins and the Chairman responded to comments.
 - b) It was questioned whether DOLGE duplicated existing functions such as internal audit and the Commercial Procurement Oversight Board, noting that financial prudence had long been a priority for the Council. Mr Fraser Moat clarified that DOLGE differed from internal audit by taking a forward-looking approach to efficiency rather than reviewing past compliance.
 - c) A Member asked how DOLGE would ensure transparency and accountability in its recommendations and how Cabinet Members would be supported in progressing proposals. Mr Fraser Moat confirmed that all of DOLGE's proposals were being discussed with Cabinet Members.
 - d) Mr Fraser Moat confirmed that approximately a quarter of a full-time equivalent (FTE) officer post provided secretarial support.
 - e) Mr Collins and the Chairman responded to criticisms, noting the challenging financial position inherited by the previous Administration, and significant pressures such as adult social care costs.
 - f) Asked whether savings would include the closing of waste sites and/or libraries, Mr Fraser Moat confirmed that all Council expenditure was being reviewed as part of the budget process, but no decisions had yet been made.

4. Mr Hood raised a point of order, supported by Mr Rayner, regarding the Chairman's level of independence within his chairing role and the Chairman commented that he was justified in providing contextual information to aid the debate. Mr Hood suggested that cost-cutting should be led by a dedicated officer rather than relying solely on Cabinet Members. The Chairman reiterated that transparency and accountability were addressed in the governance section of the report.
5. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

30. Budget Planning 2026-27 Update
(Item 8)

1. Mr Collins introduced the report on budget planning for 2026–27, which outlined major issues affecting revenue spending, the timetable for preparing the draft budget and medium-term financial plan, and the results of the summer budget consultation. The draft budget would be published in January and would include proposed investments in priority areas alongside savings proposals.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - a) It was noted that the 2025/26 £60million overspend could increase due to adult social care overspends and Mr Collins confirmed that a 1% reduction in council tax would equate to approximately £10million per year.
 - b) Asked whether the estimated increased funding, referred to in the report, included assumptions for council tax base growth and rate increases, Mr Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) confirmed that the previous Medium-Term Financial Plan assumed a 1.5% increase in the council tax base, council tax increases up to the referendum limit, and indexation on certain grants. No assumptions for fair funding were included.
 - c) Concern was expressed about the lack of early visibility of savings proposals compared to previous years, noting that earlier drafts had been helpful for scrutiny. Mr John Betts (Corporate Director Finance) explained that an earlier draft of the budget was not possible for the 2026/27 financial year due to uncertainty over fair funding and delays to the settlement.
3. RESOLVED to note the 2026-27 budget planning, timetable and strategy towards setting a balanced budget.

31. Decant of Invicta House into Sessions House Update
(Item 9)

1. Mr Collins introduced the report on the decant from Invicta House into Sessions House. Mrs Spore reported that staff were moved primarily into Blocks A, C, and D over the summer, with compliance works undertaken to ensure the environment was warm, safe, and dry.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - a) Asked about fire safety compliance (including training for Members) Mrs Spore confirmed that safety measures, including the EvacTag system, were in place across the whole building. Mrs Spore said she would follow up regarding training for Members.
 - b) Asked how accessibility needs were being addressed given the age and condition of the lifts, Mrs Spore confirmed that accessibility needs were managed through clear routes, contingency plans, and lift maintenance supported by on-site spares. She acknowledged the age-related limitations of the lifts and what was viable but confirmed that management actions were also being taken alongside the physical measures outlined above where appropriate.
 - c) Regarding the car park on County road a Member suggested repainting spaces to accommodate larger vehicles. Mrs Spore advised that this car park was leased from Network Rail, and therefore relining would require agreement. Officers agreed to consider this further.
 - d) A Member queried the cost of making the courtyard safe (and the basement underneath). Mrs Spore confirmed that the basement works had a budget allocation of approximately £600,000, with the actual cost being within this figure, primarily for structural stability and fire evacuation compliance. The space was now suitable for car parking spaces.
 - e) A Member requested an overall figure for the decant and associated works and Mrs Spore confirmed that this totalled approximately £2.4 million.
 - f) Mrs Spore explained that compliance works had focused on the “warm, safe, dry” standard, including fire alarm and emergency lighting upgrades across Blocks A and B. Additional works for systems previously rated amber or red were under review, with allocations identified in earlier decisions.
 - g) Regarding the life-expired systems referenced in the report Mrs Spore advised that fire safety systems had been renewed for long-term use, while mechanical and ventilation systems remained under assessment.
3. The Chairman thanked officers and staff for their efforts and highlighted ongoing engagement with staff groups to address emerging issues.
4. RESOLVED to note the report.

32. Work Programme 2025/26 (Item 10)

RESOLVED to note the work programme.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank Mr John Betts (Corporate Director Finance) for his work and commitment during his time at the Council.