

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 Wednesday, 14 January 2026

PRESENT: Mr C Hespe (Chairman), Mr P Chamberlain (Vice-Chair), Mr D Burns, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr H Rayner, Mr N Wibberley, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr T Mole and Mr T L Shonk

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Ms R Anderson (Head of Business Information, Strategy and Assurance), Mr M Cheverton (Head of Real Estate Services), Mr A Jeffery (Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning), Mr C Riley (Finance Business Partner), Ms C Starte (Head of Marketing and Resident Experience), Ms K Graham (Disposal, Acquisition and Investment Surveyor), Mr D Parkes (Principal Surveyor – Disposals, Acquisitions & Investments) and Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

33. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

The committee membership had been updated since the agenda was published. Mr Bradshaw from the Independent Group had joined the committee and there was a vacancy on the Independent Reformers Group.

Apologies were received from Mr Evans, Mr Finch and Ms Emberson. Mr Shonk was present as substitute for Mr Finch and Mr Mole was present as substitute for Ms Emberson.

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

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

35. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

36. Draft Budget - Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department

(Item 5)

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) introduced the report and outlined the overall budget proposals for the forthcoming year. He explained that the draft budget included £179.5m of core funded spending growth and reversals of £28m of previous savings. These spending pressures were offset by £14.7m of net reserve movements, £61.7m of new or full year savings, and £14.6m of income generation, resulting in a net change of £116.5m in revenue spending. This was funded through £66.2m from central government and retained business rates, and £50.3m from council tax and collection fund balances. The capital programme was funded entirely from external sources or planned borrowing, with no new borrowing proposed. Mr Collins explained that most spending growth related to Adult Social Care (£89.6m), Children’s Services (£50.3m), and Growth, Environment and Transport (£21.7m). He emphasised that demand and cost pressures continued to exceed government funding, requiring ongoing savings and income generation. The budget also included increased contributions to general reserves to improve resilience, alongside some drawdowns where earmarked reserves were no longer required. Although the Council welcomed reforms improving the distribution of government funding, overall settlement levels remained insufficient, necessitating council tax increases. The budget also outlined future financial challenges into 2027–28 and 2028–29.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - a) Asked about grants to district councils for council tax collection, Officers explained that the only remaining agreements related to counter fraud work on tax collection, which delivered a strong rate of return.
 - b) Asked about counter fraud funding and whether future savings could be quantified, Mr Collins responded that counter-fraud work was ongoing and that further data would be developed.
 - c) Members asked whether staff had been consulted on proposals relating to the provision of office plants, given potential links to staff wellbeing. Officers confirmed that there had been no formal consultation with staff but acknowledged the wellbeing considerations, stating that further review would follow if the budget was approved. The plant contract covered multiple buildings and involved significant volumes of planting. Mr Collins confirmed that the associated cost was one reason the service was under review.
 - d) A Member asked whether the financial risk exposure outlined in the risk register—totalling £411m—was the highest level recorded. Officers confirmed that risks had been rising for several years and that this was likely the highest to date, though it remained unlikely all risks would materialise simultaneously. Regarding the definition of “likely” within the risk framework, it was confirmed that this meant a greater than 50% chance over the three year medium term plan period.
 - e) Clarification was sought regarding apparent differences in reserve figures between the dashboard and the budget document. Officers explained the distinction between impacts on the budget and actual reserve levels, noting that planned contributions and drawdowns resulted in a net increase to reserves next year, while the budget effect appears as a net reduction due to removal of prior year one off items.

- f) A Member raised concerns regarding the use of capital receipts to support the budget, the long term impact of not maximising council tax, and the risks associated with a managed decline in the estate.
- g) Clarity was sought on funding reductions for windmill maintenance, the rationale behind changes relating to Sessions House, and car parking income. Mr Collins stated that the Administration was aware of pressures on the estate and remained committed to responsible financial management. Officers referred to the Council's "warm, safe and dry" estate strategy, the criteria for property disposal, and the ongoing review of car parking operations and charging models.
- h) Regarding arrangements for the Contact Centre, Officers confirmed that the Contact Centre would transfer to a new supplier from April with no change in operating hours and that most daytime staff would remain Kent based.
- i) Members asked about reserves and staff reductions, expressing concern about the scale of risks relative to reserve levels. Mr Collins stated his confidence in the budget's deliverability and that staffing levels were under review.
- j) Clarification was sought on council tax assumptions and Mr Collins confirmed that a council tax freeze was an ambition rather than a commitment. Officers clarified the council tax assumptions within the medium term plan, highlighting that future years include only tax base growth, with no assumed council tax rises, and that resultant funding gaps were clearly identified for future decision making.
- k) Regarding newly proposed legal posts it was explained that these were generalist roles aligned with the Council's ongoing insourcing strategy.

3. RESOLVED to note the Administration's draft capital and revenue budget proposals.

37. Performance Dashboard for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department

(Item 6)

- 1. Mr Matt Wagner, Chief Analyst, introduced the report, explaining that it was the second performance report for the 2025–26 financial year. Of the 30 Key Performance Indicators (KPI), 23 were rated green, one was amber, and six were rated red. Mr Wagner provided an overview of the six red KPIs and confirmed that over 75% of KPIs were rated green overall. He also updated the Committee on the review of KPIs for the next financial year, noting that services were being consulted on potential revisions, including the addition of a new section relating to the Commercial and Procurement Division.
- 2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) The Chairman expressed thanks to all Officers across the authority for their continued commitment and service improvement.
 - (b) Regarding the Oracle Cloud implementation, Officers confirmed that phase one reviews had already taken place and lessons were being fed into phase two, which would cover HR systems.

- (c) Asked whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) could be used to help manage FOI workloads and whether ongoing red ratings carried reputational risk, Officers confirmed that AI tools, including Copilot, were already in use wherever appropriate, but increasing volumes and complexity limited the effect. It was noted that FOI and SAR performance was the strongest it had been for a decade, but pressures were expected to grow without additional resource. Whilst additional resources had been allocated, structural pressures across social care and education limited capacity. Although financial penalties from the Information Commissioner were uncommon, the risk remained, and reputational impacts were more likely.
- (d) It was suggested that a future briefing for Members took place on the types and sources of FOIs and SARs to increase understanding of case complexity.
- (e) Regarding complaints handling capacity and the distribution of workloads across directorates, Officers explained that resolving complaints depended heavily on staff within services gathering information, particularly in social care. Increased staffing within the central complaints team would not necessarily improve performance.
- (f) Regarding the missed target for publication of budget papers linked to the October/November Cabinet Committee cycle, Officers explained that this reflected the unforeseen impact of the government's funding reform consultation. Members discussed subsequent delays in January committee papers, commenting that delays were due to political decision making. Mr Collins responded that the delay reflected careful financial consideration rather than indecision.
- (g) Members raised concerns regarding the outstanding debt owed by the Integrated Care Board. Officers confirmed that any successor body would inherit the liability. Mediation outcomes were being progressed, but both parties' agreement was still required.

3. RESOLVED to note the performance position for the Chief Executive's Department and the Deputy Chief Executive's Department.

38. Resilience Update

(Item 7)

- 1. Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report which provided an overview of incident responses and resilience activity over the previous six months. She explained that a Major Incident relating to water supply disruption across the county was currently ongoing and the Council was leading the multi-agency response to this incident including coordinating support for vulnerable settings and communities. She emphasised the complexity and rapidly changing nature of the situation. The update also outlined the Member emergency planning briefing sessions delivered by the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service for which further training dates had been scheduled and all Members were encouraged to attend.
- 2. Mr Andy Jeffery (Head of Resilience & Emergency Planning) explained that a multi-agency debrief had now been completed for the Portland Factory Club Fire in Northfleet, which identified both areas for improvement—such as welfare centre activation, communication and environmental considerations—and examples of effective practice, including multi agency liaison and strong

communication across the command structure. Recommendations were being reviewed and would be allocated to owners by the KMRF Lessons Identified, Lessons Learned group in early February. An internal KCC debrief had also been completed following the Tunbridge Wells water outage in December 2025, identifying the need to clarify out of hours processes and improve alerting arrangements, alongside examples of strong strategic leadership and staff engagement. A multi-agency debrief for that incident would follow once current resource pressures eased. Mr Jeffery paid tribute to staff across the organisation, noting the significant commitment shown by Officers both in and out of hours.

3. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) The importance of emergency-planning training for all Members was emphasised.
 - (b) Officers confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee would be considering the remit of a Short Focused Inquiry into the water outages at its next meeting and that comments made by Members would be passed to the Committee for consideration. It was noted that any inquiry should not be limited solely to the earlier Tunbridge Wells outage, but should also encompass recent and ongoing incidents.
 - (c) Members queried the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF) protocol relating to water supply disruption and the process for declaring a major incident. Officers confirmed that a multi-agency water supply disruption plan was in place, developed in consultation with all water undertakers operating in Kent.
 - (d) Members raised questions relating to repeated fires at a commercial premises, cybersecurity preparedness, international liaison in emergency scenarios involving cross Channel operations, and the management of maritime risks such as vessel collisions and hazardous cargo. Officers confirmed that cause of fire investigations were a matter for Kent Fire and Rescue Service, that cybersecurity recommendations from Exercise Troy would be reported back to a future meeting, and that international liaison sat primarily with central government, although KCC would explore whether related workstreams could sit within the KMRF.
4. The Chief Executive recognised the exceptional work undertaken by Officers across services in responding to daily and major incidents. She paid particular tribute to the Marketing and Resident Experience Service, the Resilience and Emergency Planning Service, the Director of Public Health, and the Director of Infrastructure.
5. RESOLVED to note the report.

39. Strategic Overview of Kent County Council's Peppercorn Lease Estate (Item 8)

1. Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report which provided a strategic overview of Kent County Council's peppercorn lease estate. She explained that it outlined the definition of a peppercorn lease, the reasons the Council may enter into such arrangements, and the number and

types of leases currently in place. She highlighted that some peppercorn leases were statutory requirements, particularly in relation to schools and academies established under specific legislation. Others were historical or linked to particular Council policies and regeneration projects.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
 - (a) It was noted that KCC does not operate a community asset transfer policy and only utilises peppercorn arrangements in limited, defined circumstances, ensuring compliance with statutory responsibilities and best value requirements.
 - (b) Regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) it was noted that consideration would need to be given to how existing peppercorn leases would transfer or be managed under any future structural changes. Members were reassured that all property related information and lease arrangements would be transparently shared between authorities as part of any formal transfer process.
 - (c) More detail on the properties held on peppercorn rents was requested, including the frequency with which such leases were reviewed, and whether any subletting occurred. Concern was also raised about very long leases and the appropriateness of maintaining certain arrangements in the current financial climate. Officers confirmed that existing leases were contractual agreements and could only be varied by mutual consent. Most new peppercorn leases arise from statutory requirements, such as those associated with the Academies Act 2010. Some long leasehold arrangements were used to retain strategic control while enabling partners to operate a site. Historical leases, including those inherited from other bodies, continued to be managed within these constraints. The level of detail that could be shared publicly would need to reflect commercial confidentiality and data protection requirements.
 - (d) The Chairman noted that further work on LGR would address many of the broader issues raised.

3. RESOLVED to note the report.

40. Decisions taken between Cabinet Committee meetings

(Item 9)

RESOLVED to note that Decision No. 25/00114, Disposal of the Former Gravesend Adult Education Centre, Darnley Road, Gravesend, DA11 0RX, was taken in accordance with sections 12.32 and 12.35 of the Council's constitution.

41. Work Programme 2026

(Item 10)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.

42. 25/00113 - Freehold disposal of Land at former Spires Academy, Bredlands Lane, Westbere, Canterbury CT2 0HD

(Item 11)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:

1. the disposal of Land at Former Spires Academy, Bredlands Lane, Westbere, Canterbury, CT2 0HD; and
2. to delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.