

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held Online on Friday, 25 September 2020.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour (Substitute for Mr J P McInroy), Mrs R Binks, Mr A Booth, Mr A H T Bowles, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr A Cook, Mr D Farrell, Mr S Holden, Mr A J Hook, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr G Lymer, Mr S C Manion, Mr R A Marsh (Substitute for Mr D L Brazier), Mr A M Ridgers and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr P M Hill, OBE and Mr M Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development), Mrs S Holt-Castle (Interim Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement), Mr L Burchill (Major Capital Programme Manager), Ms J Forster (Business Intelligence Officer), Mr S Grimshaw (Strategic Programme Manager), Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning Analytics), Mr D Pugh (Head of the Kent Brussels Office), Mr C Seamark (Local Growth Fund Programme Manager), Ms J Taylor-Smith (Strategic Manager, Business Development - Libraries and Registration Service), Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Miss E West (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

235. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr D Brazier and Mr J McInroy.

Mr M J Balfour was present as a substitute for Mr McInroy and Mr R A Marsh as a substitute for Mr Brazier.

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

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

237. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2020

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2020 are correctly recorded and a paper copy be signed by the Chairman as soon as this can be done safely. There were no matters arising.

238. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

1. The Cabinet Member for Communities, Mr M Hill, gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

- Public Protection's new '**Trading Standards Checked**' fair trader scheme had now successfully signed up over 500 checked and vetted traders from a wide range of trade sectors. On 21 September the website was launched to consumers and, together with Public Protection's Alternative Dispute Resolution service, provides a significant contribution to supporting vulnerable homeowners and tackling rogue traders in Kent.
- **Visits** – Mr Hill had visited libraries across Kent, including Tenterden and the Kent History and Library Centre, as well as Shorne Country Park and the Southborough Hub project, which was now moving ahead well.

2. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Mr M J Whiting, gave a verbal update on the following issues:-

- **The Straits Committee** - the tourism agencies of Pas-de-Calais, West Flanders and Kent had met recently and agreed to draw up an outline business case for marketing the Straits as a near and safe destination for longer-term recovery, digital acceleration of tourism businesses, and greater sharing of intelligence and good practices. Earlier this week, MPs from Kent and northern France signed a joint letter to President Macron and The Prime Minister, stressing the importance of cross-border trade between the UK and France and the need for fluidity across the Straits at the end of the transition period. Problems caused by restrictions to cross channel traffic and the importance of keeping traffic moving had recently been demonstrated. The next Straits Executive Committee meeting would take place on 7 October.
- **The new Employment Task Force**, a vital arm of the Kent and Medway Renewal and Resilience Plan, would hold its first meeting on 1 October, under the chairmanship of Roger Gough. The Task Force would work over the next 12 - 18 months to help ensure young people leaving education and those made redundant as a result of covid-19 would have the best opportunity to find work or to access the training they need to meet the requirements of employers. One of the first areas of focus would be maximising the benefits for Kent of the Government's Kick Start scheme.
- **High-Speed Rail** - The County Council would be contributing to a study by HS1 to help make the business case for additional high-speed rolling stock to serve Kent. The target would be to secure £90 million of Government funding to provide ten new, five-carriage trains to improve services and increase capacity.
- **The Kent Developers' Group** had met recently to discuss the Government's proposed changes to the planning system. The County Council's response to the consultation had yet to be finalised but would be detailed and robust. One area of concern shared by the County Council, district partners and developers was the effect any change in policy may have on the delivery of much-needed affordable homes. Mr Whiting had requested a substantive item on affordable housing at a future meeting of the Developers' Group.

- **Produced in Kent** and **Visit Kent** worked together to encourage people to 'buy local' and 'eat and drink local'. The campaign included a series of competitions, and Mr Whiting had been pleased to present a £100 Shepherd Neame voucher to the first winner at the Boat Yard, Yalding, last week.
3. Mr Whiting also recorded his congratulations and best wishes to Mr James McInroy and his fiancée for their wedding. The Committee added its best wishes.
 4. There were no questions and the updates were NOTED, with thanks.

239. Performance Dashboard

(Item 6)

1. Ms Kennard introduced the report and advised that this was the first dashboard to show the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Performance against all targets was rated green.
2. In response to a question about adjusting or setting new targets, Ms Holt-Castle advised that, due to the level of disruption to services caused by the covid-19 pandemic, and the resulting difficulty of setting meaningful new targets at this time of uncertainty, monitoring would continue to use last year's targets.
3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

240. 20/00083 - Local Growth Fund Round 3b Third Party Scheme - East Malling Advanced Technology Horticultural Zone

(Item 7)

Mrs T Dean was present as the local Member for the Malling Central division.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report and reassured the committee that there would be no adverse financial consequences for the County Council in the event of the project not delivering the desired outcomes. He responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) Members praised the pioneering research and development work undertaken at the East Malling research facility and noted its excellent reputation as a research pioneer and a leading international provider of agricultural training;
 - b) asked by the local Member for clarification about the progress of planning permission for the new housing, which would finance the development, Mr Smith undertook to look into the latest situation and update the committee; and
 - c) asked by the local Member about the possible negative impact of Britain leaving the European Union upon East Malling's international lead in agricultural training, Mr Smith assured the committee that no negative impact had yet been seen. Monitoring would continue with the aim of identifying any future issues, and the committee would be kept abreast of these.

2. The committee RESOLVED to endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, to:
 - a) approve the progression, via the County Council's Local Growth Fund arrangements, for the East Malling Advanced Technology Horticultural Zone, allowing it to progress to the stages of development and delivery,
to facilitate this, to:
 - i) confirm that the County Council will act as the accountable body for the project;
 - ii) enter into a Local Growth Fund (LGF) funding agreement; and
 - iii) enter into legal agreements with the relevant third parties delivering the schemes to transfer the conditions of the LGF spend and project management to them; and
 - b) delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Corporate Directors of Finance and Strategic and Corporate Services, to enter into relevant legal agreements and take other actions necessary to implement the decision.

241. 20/00086 - Investment of Getting Building Funding in Third-Party Projects
(Item 8)

1. Mr Whiting introduced the report, advised that the proposed decision was to be taken by the Leader of the Council and urged the committee to endorse it.
2. Mr Smith set out the four projects covered by the Getting Building Funding (GBF) project and advised that each of these had already been the subject of a key decision. He responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) Members welcomed the four projects and the work undertaken to bring GBF funding into Kent;
 - b) asked for more detail about the four projects, Mr Smith undertook to send summary information to the committee outside the meeting; and
 - c) concern was expressed about the timing of the projects and whether or not they would be at the right stage to use the GBF funding by the required deadline of the end of March 2022. Mr Smith advised the committee that a condition of GBF funding approval was that any scheme not able to meet the required timetable would have to return its funding, so the County Council had ensured that projects chosen were those which could be ready in time.
3. The committee RESOLVED to endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Leader of the Council, to:

- a) agree that Getting Building Funding (GBF) be used to support the third-party projects which the South East Local Enterprise Partnership's (SELEP) Strategic Board prioritised to receive GBF at its Board meeting on 16 July 2020;
- b) agree that the County Council act as the accountable body for third-party projects within Kent's geographical boundaries which are selected by the SELEP to receive GBF grant funding; and
- c) delegate to the Section 151 Officer the authority to sign, on the County Council's behalf, a grant agreement - or equivalent, where this is required - to draw down funds, following business case approval.

242. 20/00096 - Kent County Council's participation in the Straits Committee
(Item 9)

Mr D Pugh, Project Manager (Brussels), was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Whiting and Mr Smith introduced the report and Mr Pugh set out the background, summarised the work which had gone on over two years to develop the project and establish its working arrangements. Mr Smith and Mr Pugh responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked how the £100,000 funding had been calculated and what it covered, Mr Smith explained that each partner on the Straits Committee would have a small budget to spend on their own local projects and that Kent had allocated £100,000 for this. There was no detailed proposal yet about what this would be spent on, although the background documents to the report set out some initial thoughts;
- b) a view was expressed that the option of commuting from Kent to France was under-used and that young people in particular could be encouraged to take this up as a future work option. Officers were asked to ensure that Kent's young people were included in the Straits Committee's promotional work; and
- c) a view was expressed that it was important that potential commuters from Kent to mainland Europe were suitably trained, not just in languages but in the cultures of European countries.

2. The Chairman thanked Dafydd Pugh, Myriam Caron and the County Council's International team for the work they had put into supporting Kent's involvement in the Straits Committee.

3. Mrs Cooper updated the committee on recent work with partners on traffic management plans and models which would support national trade readiness and smart freight. All-Member briefings would take place in mid-October and late November to keep Members updated on the latest work.

4. Mr A Booth stated that he did not support the proposed decision and asked that this be recorded in the minutes.

5. The committee RESOLVED to endorse the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to:
 - a) confirm the participation of Kent County Council in the Straits Committee;
 - b) approve funding of £100,000 from reserves for activities connected to the Straits Committee. These will include support to joint initiatives on economic development, tackling climate change, supporting young people and any initiatives in other policy areas as agreed within the Straits Committee, the development of a strategy for the Straits Committee, the hosting of a Straits conference in Kent and the setting up of a small project support scheme; and
 - c) agree delegated authority for management of that funding to the Director of Economic Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

243. Kent & Medway Economic Recovery Dashboard

(Item 10)

1. Ms Forster gave a demonstration of the dashboard and how it could be used and advised that, to record a useful picture and allow comparison of data, the content of the dashboard had necessarily to be complex, but could be adjusted to suit requirements. *The slides used were shared with Members after the meeting.*
2. Mrs Cooper advised the committee about the introduction of the Kent Access Permit, which would support a smart freight service. Hauliers would be able to upload details of their journeys and cargo and access a 'traffic light' system which would issue them with a 'pass' to enter Dover. The Chairman added that the Cabinet Office had taken much interest in Kent's permit scheme and Kent may well be asked to share its work and data to spread the scheme further.
3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the dashboard be noted, with thanks.

244. Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan

(Item 11)

1. Mr Whiting introduced the report and advised that the Leaders of the County Council, Medway Council and other local councils had signed up to the Plan, and that further councils would be invited to do the same. He and Mr Smith responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) concern was expressed about the Plan in the light of the recent announcement about the economic viability of the hospitality sector in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic. Mr Whiting advised that the Plan could be updated to take account of this;
 - b) concern was expressed that the work of the employment taskforce may not allow elected Members time and scope to debate the Plan's development fully, and they may be presented with the final Plan as a *fait accompli*. Mr Whiting advised that Members would continue to be updated and briefed on the Plan's development and on other initiatives; and

- c) it was emphasised that Kent's agricultural sector needed to be taken fully into account. Mr Smith assured the committee that all sectors of Kent's economy would be taken into account to ensure that its recovery from the impact of covid-19 was complete.
2. It was RESOLVED that the Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan and its evidence base be noted, and Members' comments on the actions underway to take the Plan forward be taken into account in developing the Plan.

245. Front-line Community Services in context of covid-19 (Coronavirus) Recovery
(Item 12)

1. Mr Hill introduced the report and recorded his thanks to staff for their resilience in responding to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and rebuilding services. Ms Holt-Castle emphasised the breadth of services covered by the Communities portfolio and how each of them was managing the impact of the pandemic, for example, the Trading Standard service had advised 175 local companies about covid-19 compliance, Kent's public rights of way (PROW) had seen a three-fold increase in their use and country parks a 60% increase in visits during covid-19 restrictions. Mr Hill and Ms Holt-Castle then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked for detail about activity at country parks, active and cultural packs and the level of investment in PROW teams, Ms Holt-Castle undertook to provide fuller information to Members outside the meeting;
 - b) the role and excellent work undertaken by community wardens was acknowledged and an update requested on the role of wardens in enforcing covid-19 restrictions, Mr Hill advised that the relationship and partnership working between wardens and the police was strong;
 - c) asked about the number of marriages and civil partnerships conducted by the Libraries and Registration Service service in a 'normal' year compared to 2020, and the number expected to be conducted between now and January 2021, Ms Holt-Castle undertook to provide fuller information to Members outside the meeting; and
 - d) asked if the commitment not to pursue the Covid Marshalls project was consistent across all local councils in Kent, Ms Holt-Castle advised that the County Council's message to all councils had been consistent but that each Town Centre Management body would take its own approach to enforcement and was responsible for adhering to national guidance.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

246. No Use Empty - Update

(Item 13)

1. Mr Whiting introduced the report and reminded the committee that No Use Empty (NUE) was a well-established and successful scheme which made use of private sector finance to bring vacant and derelict housing stock across the county back into use. It was hoped that the scheme would be able to increase the number of affordable housing units it generated each year. Mr Grimshaw added that the number of units established under NUE now exceeded 6,000, with nine projects currently in progress. The scheme also refurbished empty buildings for residential use. Mr Grimshaw and Mr Smith responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked about the contribution the scheme could make to genuinely affordable housing, for example, at 40 – 60% of market rent, as opposed to the usual definition of affordable housing, which was 80% of market rent, Mr Smith advised that the scheme still used the Government's definition of affordable housing, to make it easier to compare schemes from different projects;
- b) asked about the mechanism for identifying and referring local properties for possible inclusion in the scheme, relating to a specific local example, Mr Grimshaw undertook to liaise with the questioner and look into the example given;
- c) asked how new build properties, former commercial buildings and conversions could be included in the scheme, Mr Grimshaw set out the criteria for each type of site and for mixed developments and advised that local councils should be the first port of call for anyone wishing to propose a new scheme; and
- d) asked about the use of green and brownfield sites, Mr Whiting advised that NUE always sought to reuse brownfield sites to protect greenfield land.

2. It was RESOLVED that the No Use Empty initiative and performance to date be noted and that Members' comments, set out above, be taken into account.

247. 2019/20 Equality and Diversity Review of Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate

(Item 14)

It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

248. Decisions taken between Cabinet Committee Meetings

(Item 15)

It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report be noted, with thanks.

249. Work Programme 2020/21

(Item 16)

1. It was noted that the following changes needed to be made to the committee's future work programme:

- The programme of district visits be postponed to mid-2021.
- A report on Adult Skills Training and Retraining be added.
- A report on the effects of the end of the furlough scheme and the start of the job support scheme on the Kent economy be added.

2. It was RESOLVED that, with the changes suggested above, the committee's work programme be noted.