

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Online on Monday, 12 October 2020.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Miss S J Carey, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr R L H Long, TD, Mr P J Oakford, Mr M D Payne, Mrs S Prendergast and Mr M Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr E Bourner (Asset Manager Drainage, Structures and Safety Barriers), Nikola Floodgate (Schemes Planning & Delivery Manager), Mr S Jones (Director of Highways, Transportation and Waste) and Mr M Tant (Flood and Water Manager)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

170. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

There were no apologies or substitutes.

171. Declaration of Interests by Member in Items on the Agenda for this meeting

(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

172. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 September 2020

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

173. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

- (1) Mrs Bell reported that the flu vaccination programme was to be expanded and Kent residents were encouraged to get flu vaccines. It was reported that flu kills, on average, 11,000 people in England each year. New research suggested that people infected with both Covid-19 and flu were more at risk of severe illness and death. The full list of people to be called for a free vaccination was available on the NHS website.

Mrs Bell reported on World Mental Health Day and signposted to Kent.gov website, a specific website for children and families and to a 24-hour helpline available to people struggling and in need of immediate help.

Andrew Scott Clark, the Director for Public Health, was to hold a briefing to update on the situation for Kent and to give a reminder about national guidelines ahead of school half term. It was reported that there was an upswing in Covid-19 cases in Kent and a reminder was given to follow the government guidelines in order to keep Kent 'open for business'.

- (2) Mrs Chandler reported that KCC was unable to change the position around Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) without a significant impact on the safe care of the children and young people already in their care.

Work was being undertaken by Mrs Chandler and the Leader with Children, Young People and Education to ensure the government moved to make the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) mandatory. This would mean that the burden of dealing with new arrivals did not fall unfairly on Kent or on other port of entry authorities. They responded to the government's consultation on the NTS on 30 September to this effect. The Leader also wrote to Minister Chris Philp on this issue; saying it was essential to ensure there was no repetition of the current crisis and the similar one which occurred in 2015.

It was reported that Headstart Kent, a programme which has enhanced the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people since 2016, had been awarded additional funding from the National Lottery to continue its work for another year.

- (3) Mr Long reported that recent returns from Kent's schools indicated attendance of pupils at school was just under 94%, which was an increase from when schools first reopened in September. There had been a number of cases since schools reopened where large numbers of individuals in schools had to self-isolate. Public Health, Education, and Health and Safety officers continued to work closely with schools providing advice and guidance as required.

Arrangements for the Kent Test had been significantly impacted by Covid-19. Plans were in place for Kent pupils to sit the Kent Test on Thursday, 15 October and for out of county applicants to sit the test from Saturday, 17 October. The Fair Access team in the Children Young People and Education directorate had been working on arrangements for many months to ensure contingency plans were in place for a range of different scenarios and that pupils and staff remain safe throughout the testing process.

Detailed guidance was issued to schools on 21 September to ensure the test was conducted fairly and safely in line with Covid-19 guidance. The whole process had been designed to ensure there was an opportunity for a child's wider circumstances to be considered before their assessment was finalised, which would help minimise the chance of any child being at a disadvantage when compared to their peers. The Kent Test Head Teacher Assessment had always been available for pupils who did not perform as well as expected on the day of the test and this would remain the case this year. Work with schools would continue up to the date of the test and once the results start to become available.

A record number of late applications for the Kent Travel Saver had been received for this year, however, Education have worked diligently with the

Public Transport Unit to clear the backlog. Application levels were returning to normal and, while challenging, sufficient capacity had been maintained. Thanks were given to officers, in particular the Public Transport Unit for their hard work.

- (4) Mr Payne reported that it had been 50 years since the formation of London County Buses and their green liveries were now being re-created by Arriva and Go Coach. Arriva were contracted to deliver the successful fast-track service in the Ebbsfleet area and Go Coach had been working on the demand responsive transport system, in and around Sevenoaks. Both companies are looking into the next generation of electric buses.

The 12th Annual Kent Rail Summit was due to launch the Kent Rail Strategy 2021 which was already out to consultation. Eminent speakers from Southeastern, Network Rail and HS1 were on the programme for the summit which was being held online.

- (5) Mr Whiting attended a virtual meeting of the Straits Committee, which was hosted by colleagues from the Département du Nord. They were seeing young people and employment emerging as the strongest themes for action by the committee. As the UK leaves the EU, the end of the transition period was also considered a key area. Ten Kent MPs had written to President Macron and the Prime Minister calling for a smooth transition.

The East Kent Opportunities LLP, a partnership company between KCC and Thanet District Council, had agreed further land disposals and drawn down funds by way of a dividend to each council amounting to £600,000.

The planning white paper had been front and centre at a number of meetings attended by Mr Whiting.

He reported that visits had been made to three excellent No Use Empty projects in Dover, including new build homes, commercial development and the refurbishment of a town centre church into a number of apartments. Congratulations were given to Steve Grimshaw and his team for the growing success of this scheme, which was discussed with Essex CC at the regular bilateral meeting, and they expressed an interest in the scheme and details of how the scheme works would be shared with them.

- (6) Miss Carey reported on the response to the Solar Together project which used KCC's procurement expertise and the collective buying power of Kent residents to get the best possible price with reliable Kent businesses for new solar panels or extra battery storage for those who already have panels. 3,650 Kent households had registered an interest in the scheme and were waiting to be contacted with their quote.

There had been a strong response to the invitation to the Plan Bee pollinator conference on 16 November. As an online event, it would be able to accommodate the several hundred people who had already said they would like to attend.

This would be followed by the formal launch of the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy at the Kent Environment Strategy Conference on 27 November which would also be online. Lord Debben, the chairman of the UK's Climate Change Committee would be the keynote speaker.

It was reported on how Household Waste Recycling Centres had been coping since the cap was raised on bookings from two visits per household a month to four. The booking system enabled control over the number of visitors at each site without creating queues outside and it was also helping to understand where demand was greatest so efforts could be made to match that demand with more capacity.

Overall, there was 67% increase in usage compared with before the lockdown, but the booking system meant demand could be spread throughout the day. Within that figure were three sites in Kent where demand was still very high for available slots. These included the Tovil site at Maidstone where work was being undertaken with the contractor to try to speed up throughput. Tovil had been under extra pressure because Medway had not yet reopened their Cuxton site. In the long term the new Household Waste Recycling centre planned for Allington would also relieve pressure at Tovil. Similarly, a new site was planned for Folkestone which was another of the exceptionally busy sites and this would expand capacity in the long term. Overall, the new booking system was working well, and the sites were able to offer a safe environment for both visitors and staff.

(7) Mr Hill reported on National Libraries Week and the focus was on how libraries allow people to discover a world of reading. Initiatives that had allowed libraries to support the community and build on the success of the libraries' online presence were highlighted. It was reported that online readership had increased significantly since the Covid-19 crisis. Libraries, Registration and Archives had offered a large variety of online events and activities on Facebook and Twitter, including information on support available to customers in lockdown and a mini book festival with author events. The Home Library Service had been re-started following a pause. Contact had been maintained with customers by telephone. Despite the restrictions imposed by Covid-19, Kent Libraries were able to make a vibrant contribution to National Libraries Week.

(8) Mrs Prendergast encouraged participation in the Budget Consultation which was open to Kent residents, businesses, voluntary and public sector organisations as well as KCC staff and would run between 14 October and 24 November on the public website and on other formats. It was acknowledged that KCC would be facing its biggest budgetary challenges in the last decade and it was considered vital to take account of as many people's views as possible in making the difficult decisions around balancing the budget.

Public Health messages have been very important as the cases of Covid-19 had increased. The Communications and Engagement Teams had been working closely with Public Health and Health & Safety professionals to keep messaging for both residents and staff consistent and clear.

- (9) Mr Oakford reported that budget amendments had been finalised for this financial year, which were approved in September by the County Council but work was being done on the Budget for the next financial year. There were enormous levels of spending pressure whilst still operating in a climate of uncertainty. It was considered more important than ever that residents take time to look at the survey as for the first time, they were being asked to help to look at where money can be saved and not just where money should be spent.
- (10) Mr Gough reported that work was accelerating on the proposed Interim Strategic Plan which replaced the 5 year plan that was in the process of being brought forward to County Council in March 2020 when lockdown started and some of the assumptions that were in the plan were brought into question. Work was being done with members on the proposed Interim Strategic Plan and the feedback from the Budget Consultation would also inform the work on the Plan.

Work was continuing on preparations for Brexit and a briefing would be held for Members on 13 October 2020. There would also be an item for the County Council meeting on Brexit preparations in order that members and the public would have clarity on what KCC were seeking to do to ensure that Kent residents and businesses were not disrupted under those circumstances.

174. Mitigating Surface Water Flood Risk on the Highway

(Item 5)

- (1) Mr Payne introduced the report which had been requested at the Cabinet meeting of 22 June 2020 due to increased incidences of flash flooding. The report sought to identify issues regarding managing surface water flood risk and the actions taken in order to mitigate these risks. Thanks were given to the Drainage Asset Team for both their proactive work and reactive responses in recent times. Thanks were also given to the team managing the Blue Green Infrastructure Project.
- (2) Mr Jones reported that in June 2020, it had been identified there had been a number of incidences of significant surface flooding across the county and plans had been made in the following areas:
- Mapping and understanding the drainage network;
 - Feeding this information into updated Surface Water Management Plan;
 - Operational considerations around the network maintenance and changes to the way assets were managed;
 - New and innovative ways such as Live Labs, using a managed monitoring approach to looking after assets rather than a preventative approach, giving better productivity;
 - Improvements to the network using technology such as smart gullies, sustainable and natural ways of managing surface water such as Blue Green schemes.
 - Looking at the root cause of surface water flooding on the highway as in many cases the water is coming from elsewhere;
 - Looking at how work could be done with organisations, the off-takers of the surface water on the highways.

(3) Resolved that the report be noted.

175. Emergency Active Travel Programme
(Item 6)

(1) Mr Payne introduced the report referring to comments made at the previous meeting, the schemes had been implemented to the government's deadlines and as a result, residents had not been consulted due to the timescale given. Where the schemes that had been implemented were not working properly, it was agreed that they would cease, and this had been the case with several of the trials. However, it was noted that the majority of the schemes had been well received. Further changes would need to be made but this was part of testing the concept schemes on behalf of the government. The schemes that had been well received included school streets, public rights of way improvement and 20mph areas in towns. If awarded, Tranche 2 funding would be for strategic cycleways separated from the main carriageway and these would need to be subject to full public consultation.

(2) Mr Jones reported that it had been a difficult situation with public consultation and the nature of the programme had meant that some individuals and groups felt insufficiently consulted. Going forward, this will be rectified.

(3) The Leader thanked the teams involved for their work on the Emergency Active Travel Programme as it was difficult to manage concerns around public consultation under the time constraints involved.

(4) In response to questions, it was noted:

- Some communities had felt that the Emergency Active Travel Programme measures had been imposed. The intention for the future would be for schemes to be planned and permanent with considered public consultation.
- The schemes part of the Emergency Active Travel Programme had been supported by borough and district councils.
- Concerns were raised around cycle lanes occupying lanes which had previously been for traffic and emergency vehicles and the impact this has on the movement of traffic.
- Cycle routes off of the highway and leisure cycling would be part of Tranche 2 works.

(5) Resolved that the report be noted

176. "Planning for the Future" White Paper
(Item 7)

(Sarah Platts, Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Manager was in attendance for this item)

(1) Mr Whiting introduced the report. KCC and many other colleagues from local government across the country had responded very strongly to the

government consultation regarding changes to current planning system. Kent MPs had raised concerns in the Commons around the same issues. Concerns were raised about the provision of strategic infrastructure.

- (2) Ms Platts gave an overview of the White Paper and outlined the key reforms and considerations for KCC. The White Paper included many sweeping reforms which would have a massive impact on how growth is planned and how the supporting infrastructure would come about. It was noted that the White Paper was lacking in detail.

The White Paper was mainly focussed on housing and argued that house building was being slowed down by the planning system. There was little detail around reforms that could affect KCC.

The White Paper was stated to put more focus on design and digitise the planning process. Land use plans would be introduced, with three types of land categories: "growth areas", "renewal areas" and "protected areas".

It was raised as a concern that arbitrary timescales are being proposed to be set without due consideration to statutory consultees such as KCC and without due regard for the level of detail that would be required at an early stage during the Local Plan process in order to categorise land uses.

The Duty to Cooperate, which has been important in strategic planning (including of minerals and waste management), was to be lost but there was no detail around what would replace it.

Transport and Highways are integral to planning for growth but are hardly mentioned in the White Paper.

One of the key areas of concern is the funding of infrastructure. The current way of securing funding through Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy are due to be scrapped and would be replaced with an infrastructure levy which would be a proportion of the value of the development, set above a fixed threshold. Again, details around how this would operate are limited.

- (3) In response to questions, the following points were raised:

- Developers hold responsibility for housing delivery, not councils, but this is not properly captured in the White Paper
- Concerns were raised around the potential loss of employment land being re-allocated for housing sites and that this could result in areas of housing development without local employment.
- Comments were made regarding the potential for a reduced level of public consultation in an attempt to streamline the process to accelerate the delivery of housing.
- Proposals about authorities being able to borrow against infrastructure levies were of concern.

- Where the White Paper is 'silent' on a number of issues, it was suggested that the response from KCC could seek to put forward solutions and produce a solution focussed response.

(4) Resolved that the comments made be included in KCC's response and that the signing of KCC's response to the White Paper be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development.

177. Congratulations

The Leader congratulated the former Leader of KCC, Mr Carter, and announced that Mr Carter had been named in the Queen's Birthday Honours list and would receive a knighthood.