

From: Roger Gough, Leader

To: County Council, 10 December 2020

Subject: ‘*Setting the Course*’ – Kent County Council’s Interim Strategic Plan

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: Cabinet (30.11.20)

Future Pathway: N/A

SUMMARY: The development of a new 5 Year Plan for Kent County Council has been postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. ‘*Setting the Course*’ is Kent County Council’s Interim Strategic Plan and sets out the immediate challenges and opportunities Kent is faced with and the actions we will prioritise to address them over the next 18 months. It has been informed by Member priorities, as well as recent public engagement and consultation for the draft 5 Year Plan. Cabinet endorsed the Interim Strategic Plan on 30 November and recommended it to County Council for approval.

Recommendation:

County Council is asked to:

(1) **Approve** ‘*Setting the Course*’ - Kent County Council’s Interim Strategic Plan.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) has traditionally developed a series of strategic plans which set out the administration’s ambitions and priorities. This is a part of the Policy Framework in KCC’s Constitution and influences our strategy, budget, commissioning and service delivery. The current strategic statement ‘*Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes*’, approved by County Council in March 2015, ended in 2020.

1.2 In summer 2019, KCC began developing a new 5 Year Plan which could replace the previous strategic statement. ‘*Kent’s Future, Our Priority*’ – Kent County Council’s 5 Year Plan 2020-25 was developed, informed by nine months of engagement and consultation with residents, businesses and partners. It was endorsed by Cabinet on 2 March 2020 and was due to be approved by County Council later that month.

1.3 In March 2020, the country entered the first national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The March County Council meeting was cancelled, which meant that the 5 Year Plan was not taken for approval. The development of the 5 Year Plan was paused to allow KCC to focus on the immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis and take stock of the changing circumstances.

- 1.4 As the crisis developed, it became clear that its impacts would be significant, and a new interim strategic plan would be needed to respond to this in the short- to medium-term. '*Setting the Course*' Kent County Council's Interim Strategic Plan explains the immediate challenges Kent is facing and the actions KCC will prioritise to lead Kent through the next 18 months. The plan sets out the challenges and vital opportunities we will focus on addressing to support the county to recover, build resilience and reset.
- 1.5 Development of a new 5 Year Plan will begin in 2021 to set KCC's longer-term priorities and ambitions for the county.

2. THE INTERIM STRATEGIC PLAN

- 2.1 The Interim Strategic Plan is attached as **Appendix A**. The plan will be available as an electronic copy only to improve accessibility and minimise environmental impact.
- 2.2 The plan is structured around the five key challenges. These are:
 - **Financial** – KCC is facing a significant budget gap and difficult decisions to make in the short- to medium-term, while maintaining a longer-term view of what is best for the county.
 - **Economic** – the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 is causing widespread economic impacts, while attracting investment and putting infrastructure in place to support growth remains a priority.
 - **Demand** – there is increasing demand for some of KCC's key services, which will be exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19 on Kent's residents, particularly those that are vulnerable.
 - **Partnership** – the crisis presents important opportunities to build on strengthened relationships and rethink how KCC works with partners to better manage demand and improve efficiency.
 - **Environmental** – tackling the climate emergency and protecting the natural environment continues to be an urgent priority, as well as investing in the built environment and creating communities to be proud of.
- 2.3 For each challenge there is an introductory narrative that explains why it is important, followed by the priority actions KCC will deliver to help address the challenge.
- 2.4 While the challenges facing the county are significant, there are also important opportunities presented by the current situation to improve the services we provide and support the county to emerge stronger and more sustainable. The priority actions set out in the Interim Strategic Plan seek to balance the overriding need to balance the budget and set a

sustainable medium-term financial plan, meet people's needs, and seize opportunities to embed positive change for the future.

- 2.5 The priority actions set out in the Interim Strategic Plan have been shaped through cross-party engagement with KCC Members and with senior officers. Trade Unions have been engaged and provided feedback on the draft priority actions which has been used to make improvements to the final version.
- 2.6 The priority actions have also been strongly informed by nine months of extensive engagement and consultation on the 5 Year Plan during 2019 and early 2020. Engagement included qualitative workshops with a representative sample of Kent residents and meetings and workshops with KCC Members and staff, young people in the county, voluntary and community groups, Town and Parish Council representatives, business representatives and key public sector partners. Engagement focused on understanding priorities to improve quality of life in the county and this shaped the draft of the 5 Year Plan. A public consultation was held over January and February 2020 to test the draft, which received an unprecedented level of engagement for a high-level strategic document of this nature. A '*You Said, We Did*' document was created to show how engagement shaped the draft and how formal consultation resulted in substantive improvements to the final version.
- 2.7 The Interim Strategic Plan has benefitted from the scale and strength of this previous engagement and consultation. Although the context in which KCC is working has changed, many of the priorities that residents and other stakeholders identified to improve quality of life in the county are still relevant and have been carried forward into the Interim Strategic Plan.
- 2.8 Development of the plan has also drawn on the findings of the public budget consultation during summer 2020 and emerging findings of the public consultation on the 2021/22 budget which has been underway during development of the Interim Strategic Plan. This has provided an insight into the current priorities and views of residents and provided important context for the plan.

3. EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 An extensive Equality Impact Assessment was carried out during the development of the 5 Year Plan and was revisited and updated throughout its development. The draft Equality Impact Assessment was consulted on as part of the public consultation on the draft 5 Year Plan, and resulted in multiple improvements being made, which were set out in the Equality Impact Assessment and *You Said, We Did* document.
- 3.2 The equality considerations for the 5 Year Plan concluded that there were no negative or adverse impacts on protected characteristic groups and there was potential for positive impact on people from all of the protected groups through aiming to improve quality of life. It also concluded that any specific proposals or changes arising from the delivery of the plan would

be subject to separate equality analysis and consideration of equality impacts.

- 3.3 Over the summer of 2020, KCC led the development of an Equality Impact Assessment for the development of the Kent Resilience Forum COVID-19 Recovery Strategy. This drew upon the intelligence and experience of all partners involved in recovery to start understanding the emerging impact of the crisis on people from different protected characteristic groups and how adverse impacts could be mitigated.
- 3.4 The development of the Interim Strategic Plan has been influenced by the findings of the recent Equality Impact Assessments for these documents, which like the Interim Strategic Plan also consider a broad range of actions across all service areas and cover the whole of the Kent population.
- 3.5 As was proposed for the 5 Year Plan, all specific proposals of changes arising from the Interim Strategic Plan will be subject to separate, specific consideration of equality impacts and consultation in line with KCC policy.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Subject to County Council approval, the Interim Strategic Plan will be published on KCC's website and promoted to residents, partners and staff through KCC's usual communication channels.
- 4.2 The final section of the Interim Strategic Plan explains how it will be delivered through the Strategic Reset Programme and Divisional and Service Level Business Plans. Monitoring will be through KCC's usual governance channels, including through regular Cabinet updates and oversight by Cabinet Committees.
- 4.3 Development of the new 5 Year Plan for KCC will begin in 2021. As before, this will be shaped from the start by engagement with residents, businesses, community groups and partners and subject to formal consultation and equality considerations.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The recommendations are as follows:

County Council is asked to:

- 1) Approve '*Setting the Course*' – Kent County Council's Interim Strategic Plan.

6. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

6.1 Appendix for this item:

Appendix A – *Setting the Course* Kent County Council's Interim Strategic Plan

6.2 Background items:

- *'Kent's Future, Our Priority'* 5 Year Plan - published for County Council March 2020
- *'Kent's Future, Our Priority'* 5 Year Plan Equality Impact Assessment
- *'Kent's Future, Our Priority'* *'You Said, We Did'* – How your feedback has helped shape KCC's 5 Year Plan
- Kent Resilience Forum COVID-19 Recovery Strategy Equality Impact Assessment

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