

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Online on Tuesday, 17 November 2020.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mr P M Hill, OBE and Mr M Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr R Hancock (Programme Manager (Area Lead - Infrastructure)), Mrs S Holt-Castle (Interim Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement), Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning Analytics), Mr R Kidd (Project Manager (Area Lead – Infrastructure)), Ms N Liddiard (Intelligence and Standards Manager), Mr M Overbeke (Head of Public Protection), Mr S Rock (Head - Trading Standards), Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Miss E West (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

250. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Lymer, Mr Hook, Mr Cook, Mr Ridgers and Barbara Cooper.

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

(Item 3)

No declarations of interest were made.

252. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2020

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2020 are correctly recorded and a paper copy be signed by the Chairman as soon as this can be done safely.

253. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) gave a verbal update on the following issues:

- a) Mr Hill referred to the effects of the recent lockdown on community services and said that the effects had not been as severe as the first period of lockdown. Country parks and Public Rights of Way (PRoW) had stayed open

and the community warden service continued to operate fully. Libraries had been more restricted, but there were 27 libraries open in Kent on a 'select and collect' basis, as well as the essential use of computers. The death registrations continued by phone as did face-to-face birth registrations. Marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at both KCC register offices and external venues could have no more than 15 people attending and under tier 3 wedding receptions were not permitted. Citizenship ceremonies continued on a restricted basis.

- b) Mr Hill said that the Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) service were assessed externally every year as part of the Customer Service Excellence Award scheme. In usual circumstances, external assessors would visit to undertake the annual assessment, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year, the assessment would be virtual. He announced that Kent had received a full score of 24 compliance passes on the 24 elements of the CSE standard. He thanked officers within LRA for their dedication and hard work during these unprecedented times.
 - c) Mr Hill referred to Kent's Sport & Physical Activity Service and said that the service had managed and co-ordinated delivery of Kent's award commended project which had recently been announced as the winner of two national industry awards. The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery fund and had won the contribution to wellbeing award as well as being the overall winner of the 2020's best community archive and heritage group. The award for the project explored, reserved, and promoted the rich history of sport in East Kent and the activities contributed towards improving the mental and physical wellbeing of older people, those experiencing social isolation and loneliness and those living with dementia.
- (2) Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) gave a verbal update on the following issues:
- a) On 1 October 2020, Mr Whiting spoke at the Kent Construction Live conference, emphasising the importance of the construction sector as one of the largest sectors in the county. He said that that every £1 invested in the construction industry generated over £2 in a wider economy and that 60% of Kent's new builds were delivered by smaller enterprises employing less than 100 people. He said that construction was a vital part of the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and referred to government's white paper on planning reform and changes to the current system. Mr Whiting and the Leader of the Council, Mr Gough, had signed a letter to the Secretary of State in response to the government's consultations. He added that whilst housing development was required to meet the needs of a growing population, Kent must remain a great place to live, work and spend quality leisure time, and that would be achieved through good investment in infrastructure.
 - b) In late October 2020, Mr Whiting met with the Straits Committee to discuss the way in which Kent's Vision Strategy could be developed from 2021. He highlighted a Pen Pal scheme which Straits partners had been invited to join, with a view to extending the scheme to secondary schools across the regions of Belgium, Holland and France to give students the chance to communicate with somebody their own age in another European country. He added that as

the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic improved, the scheme could involve arranged visits as part of the development work.

- c) Mr Whiting had recently attended a freeports bid workshop which had been hosted by Dover port to note the government's recent freeports consultation which was set out to provide a framework within which freeport bids were likely to be measured. Kent County Council fully supported the creation of a freeport in the county as it had the potential to bring new business and opportunities into the county.
 - d) Mr Whiting and the Leader of the Council, Mr Gough, spoke in November 2020 at the launch of the Kent Property Market report which was an annual report that Kent County Council and many of the Council's partners subscribed to. Locate in Kent reported a very large increase in the number of companies that sought to invest in Kent, including many London-based enterprises looking for relocation properties in Kent. Mr Whiting said that the challenge was ensuring that those opportunities existed to attract extra businesses.
 - e) Mr Whiting said that although he was unable to attend the virtual Bee summit which had taken place on 16th November 2020, more than 200 people attended. He said that one of the aims of the important piece of work, which he had submitted to full Council during his time as Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, was to help find and create suitable habitats for pollinators. He said that the summit being held virtually as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had enabled greater use of technology and public participation. He congratulated Miss Carey (Cabinet Member for Environment) and all of those who had been involved in the campaign. He said Mr Holden had led Kent's Plan Bee campaign, with the help of Allison Campbell-Smith (Programme Manager, Kent Ambassadors, Kent Vision Live and KEiBA) and that it was the most successful online event that Kent County Council had run since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, with over 277 people registered. Mr Holden explained the campaign's importance in an economic, environmental, and social sense and thanked Ms Campbell-Smith for her dedication and support in ensuring the campaign's success. He added that the campaign would continue with more summits taking place and pollinator-friendly activities.
- (3) A Member of the Committee commended the recent Bee summit and Kent's Plan Bee campaign.
- (4) RESOLVED that the verbal updates be noted.

254. Performance Dashboard

(Item 6)

Ms R Kennard (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item

- (1) Ms Kennard introduced the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Performance Dashboard which set out the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the LRA service had adopted a temporary set of indicators to reflect current delivery of services and had not set targets. Similarly, the Environment, Planning and Enforcement Division had not

set targets. Economic Development had set targets against indicators, which had been RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rated. This quarter of the four KPIs, three were RAG rated Green having achieved target, and one was rated Amber.

- (2) In response to a question, Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) acknowledged the challenges and concerns raised in relation to PRow faults and identifying funding solutions as soon as possible. Mrs Holt-Castle referred to the additional wear and tear on the PRow and explained the existing prioritisation process of how principal faults picked up under KPI EPE16 (*Median number of days to resolve priority faults on Public Rights of Way*) were addressed. She commended the work of staff and volunteers throughout the second period of lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of support and in ensuring that additional demand continued to be met.
- (3) RESOLVED that the information contained within the Performance Dashboard be noted.

255. Design in Kent's Built Environment

(Item 7)

Mr R Kidd (Project Manager (Area Lead - Infrastructure)) was in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Smith and Mr Kidd introduced the report which set out the activity underway to raise the quality of design in Kent's built environment. The report also addressed how the activity responded to the government's proposed planning reforms in relation to design. He then presented and navigated through the Kent Design Guide website and explained each detail of the website to the committee.
- (2) Mr Kidd then responded to a number of comments and questions from members of the committee, including the following:
 - a) Mr Kidd explained some of the significant challenges faced in relation to developers and the volume and quality of new-build houses. He said that the government's white paper on planning reform would positively affect design and construction during all stages and that very robust responses to government on planning matters would continue.
 - b) In response to a question, Mr Kidd referred to the design guide's timescales and said that whilst there was still a significant amount of technical detail to explore, he was confident that the programme would be met. He added that colleagues in Infrastructure continued to work hard to develop the site as quickly as possible and to ensure that all of the technical guidance was uploaded to the website.
 - c) In response to a question, Mr Kidd referred to some of the poorer-quality new-builds in the county and said there was an opportunity for Infrastructure to liaise with district and borough councils in relation to the adoption of the guide and to look to improve their own design guidance at their local level. He said that whilst the quality of transparency of design guidance between districts and borough councils would differ, the government's paper on planning reform

would assist in supporting Kent's aspirations to make the design guide as effective, robust, and well-supported as possible.

- d) In response to a question, Mr Kidd referred to issues which related to permitted development rights and said that more information on the matter would be provided within government's white paper on planning reform. He briefly talked about the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on town centres and the retail sector and how the traditional retail of town centres took a different form and operated online.

- (3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

256. 20/00103 - Regional Growth Fund Administrative Changes

(Item 8)

- (1) Mr Smith introduced the report which outlined a proposal to allow Thurrock companies limited access to loans from the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) under the same terms and conditions as those offered to Kent and Medway companies.
- (2) RESOLVED that the proposed decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to delegate authority to Director of Economic Development to:
- (i) Enter into relevant contracts, legal agreements and put appropriate arrangements in place required to implement this decision, allowing Thurrock Companies to access loans from the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF);
 - (ii) Finance loans from recycled loan repayments previously obtained from Thurrock companies that received funds via the former RGF Tiger programme; and
 - (iii) Agree that these loans shall be subject to the same rules, criteria and administrative charges as loans that are allocated under the existing KMBF to Kent and Medway companies,

be endorsed.

257. Regional Growth Fund Monitoring Report - Q1 2020/21

(Item 9)

Sir Paul Carter (Chairman of the Kent and Medway Business Fund Investment Advisory Board (Regional Growth Fund)) was in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Smith introduced the report which summarised the results of Kent County Council's monitoring returns for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020 from businesses that had received loans and equity from Kent County Council managed Government funded Business Investment Schemes - the current Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) scheme and the former Regional Growth Fund (RGF) schemes.

- (2) Sir Paul addressed the Committee and provided background information in relation to the establishment of the RGF, the RGF schemes' successes and loan monitoring. He sincerely thanked all of those that had served on the various boards over the years for sacrificing their time very generously and aided the Council in making sensible decisions with positive outcomes.
- (3) Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) reiterated Sir Paul's comments and thanked the volunteers who had served on the various boards.
- (4) Members of the committee commended the report and the positive work that had been carried out over the years.
- (5) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

258. KCC Public Protection Intelligence Team

(Item 10)

Mr M Overbeke (Head - Public Protection) and Ms N Liddiard (Intelligence and Standards Manager) were in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Mr Overbeke and Ms Liddiard introduced the report which informed the cabinet committee of the excellent work undertaken by the Public Protection Intelligence Team since its establishment in 2012.
- (2) In response to a question, Ms Liddiard said that the Public Protection Intelligence Team were already aware of the concerns raised in relation to Barnfield Park, Sevenoaks. She confirmed that further information would be provided to a member of the committee outside of the meeting.
- (3) RESOLVED that the report be noted

259. Trading Standards Activity and Preparations for the end of Transition

(Item 11)

Mr M Overbeke (Head - Public Protection) and Mr S Rock (Head - Trading Standards) were in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Mr Overbeke and Mr Rock introduced the report which provided an update on Kent County Council Trading Standards activities in preparation for the end of Transition and highlighted some of the challenges ahead.
- (2) Mr Rock then responded to a number of comments and questions from Members of the Committee, including the following: -
 - a) Mr Rock referred to point 5.3 of the report and said that the funding of staff was still being negotiated and that to date, none of the additional Brexit funding referred to within the report had been received.
 - b) In terms of staff Mr Rock said that staff within the Ports Team and Animal Health officers were recruited directly from members of the public. He said that whilst Animal Health officers needed to have a degree of enforcement

experience, Ports Team officers did not necessarily have to have enforcement experience, it was important that they had the right focus and attitude to work within the role effectively.

- c) Mr Rock said that a lot of the routine work within Trading Standards had been put on hold to prioritise issues which related to Covid-19. He added that the border operating model meant that the impact on the service would not be felt significantly until July 2021.
- d) Mr Rock referred to section 5.2.4 of the report and hoped that the apprenticeship scheme would be in place within approximately one year. He said that whilst Trading Standards did train staff, the cost of hiring professionally qualified staff was substantial. The apprenticeship scheme would provide on-the-job training and those passing the apprenticeship would still be required to take the three-year qualification to carry out the three statutory areas of work (weights and measures, food standards and feed). The scheme would also mean that the qualified officers would have more time to manage the demand that would come as a result of Brexit.
- e) Mr Rock stated that there was a national shortage of qualified Trading Standards officers.

(3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

260. District Visits Programme 2021

(Item 12)

Mr R Hancock (Programme Manager (Area Lead - Infrastructure)) was in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Hancock introduced the report which outlined the proposed programme of member visits to Kent districts in 2021.
- (2) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

261. Covid-19 Economic Update

(Item 13)

- (1) Mr Smith and Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) presented a series of slides which set out information about Covid-19, its impact on Kent's economy, and the measures that would be put in place to support business and jobs in the recovery phase.
- (2) In response to a question, Mr Whiting welcomed the government's decision to extend the national furlough scheme and said that whilst the decision to extend the scheme had been announced later than expected, there were many factors for the Chancellor to consider in a fast-changing environment. He said the furlough scheme had saved many jobs across the county, and nationally, and the extension to the scheme until March 2021 would help to ensure, particularly for the hard-hit hospitality industry, that the workers who were most at risk of losing their jobs would now not be quite so vulnerable. He added that the Director of

Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark, briefed Cabinet Members' at CMM every Monday morning in relation to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- (3) Mr Whiting paid tribute to Mr Smith and his staff who were working tirelessly to continue supporting the Kent economy.
- (4) RESOLVED that the information contained within the presentation slides be noted.

262. Work Programme 2020-21

(Item 14)

- (1) A Member of the Committee requested that the relevant Cabinet Member provided a verbal update at the next meeting of the Cabinet Committee in relation to Trading Standards.
- (2) RESOLVED that the work programme for 2020-21 be noted