

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the online on Thursday, 14 January 2021

PRESENT: Mr B J Sweetland (Chairman), Mr M A C Balfour, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr R H Bird, Mr T Bond, Mr N J D Chard, Mr G Cooke, Mrs M E Crabtree, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr D Farrell and Mr H Rayner

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr E E C Hotson, Mr R L H Long, TD and Miss D Morton

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Canon P Bruinvels (Kent County Council Civilian-Military Liaison Adviser and Military Expert), Ms D Exall (Strategic Relationship Adviser), Ms L Jackson (Policy Manager), Mr J Sanderson (Head of Property Operations), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer) and Ms E Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

250. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr D Murphy and the Head of Paid Service, Mr D Cockburn.

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

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

252. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2020

(Item 4)

1. Mr D Farrell asked why a briefing note about various property issues following on from the November meeting, which had been emailed to the committee, was marked 'confidential', and if any of the information in it could be made public. Mr Watts undertook to look into this and advise Mr Farrell.
2. It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2020 are correctly recorded and that a paper copy be signed by the Chairman when this can be done safely.

253. Annual Report on the Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent

(Item 5)

1. Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, and Armed Forces Champion, Mr R H Long, introduced the report and thanked the officer team for their work. Canon Bruinvels then set out the scope of the covenant, the joint working arrangements between the County Council and the Army and the team's priorities for 2021. He advised the committee that the Armed Forces Bill would be placed before parliament shortly. The covenant was also concerned with the welfare of the children of service personnel, of which there were currently 1,200 in Kent, and the 77,000 veterans and ex-service personnel in Kent. Canon Bruinvels responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) children of service personnel were known to perform well at school. Asked if the County Council could do any more to support them by increasing the service pupil premium, he urged any Member who was a school governor to check that this was being spent to the best advantage. It would be helpful if a good practice guide to using service pupil premium could be produced;
- b) the service pupil passport was a Kent scheme which recorded the academic performance of children of service personnel so their academic record could travel with them to their next posting;
- c) asked for reassurance that army veterans were receiving the care they needed to help them cope during the pandemic, he advised that, although many clubs had had to close due to the current restrictions, the Armed Forces charity, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) was working with veterans online. However, many veterans did not have access to online facilities and SSAFA was not able to make house calls; and
- d) the Royal British Legion had a high profile in the Maidstone area and did much good work locally. Its 100th anniversary in 2021 was expected to be marked by virtual activities. Canon Bruinvels advised that the Legion and SSAFA worked closely together to support veterans.

2. The Chairman thanked the team for all the work they undertook on behalf of the County Council and thanked Canon Bruinvels for attending and answering the committee's questions.

3. It was RESOLVED that work to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent be noted and welcomed and the County Council's commitment to this work be endorsed.

254. Draft Capital Programme 2021-24 and Revenue Budget 2021-22

(Item 6)

1. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Mr P J Oakford, introduced the report and advised that, as in previous years, Cabinet Committees were being asked to discuss and comment on the budget before it was considered by the full Council. Ms Cooke

and Mr Shipton then summarised the report and detailed the national and local context in which this year's budget had been set and the measures taken by the County Council to manage the impact of these.

2. Mr Oakford, Ms Cooke and Mr Shipton then responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) the work which had gone into preparing the budget was commended and officers were thanked for their time and diligence;
- a) asked about funding being made available to improve broadband in Kent, now that so many more people needed to work from home, Ms Cooke advised that broadband improvement was being addressed jointly by the Growth, Environment and Transport and Strategic Corporate Services directorates. On behalf of Mr M Whiting, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Mr Oakford undertook to provide Members with a simple guide to helping Kent residents to address any broadband issues;
- b) asked what percentage of the Council's budget was taken up by staff costs, Mr Shipton advised that salaries and pensions for directly-employed staff made up only about 20% of the total budget. Ms Cooke added that staff costs represented a smaller percentage of the budget than previously as the Council had moved gradually to being a commissioning body; many former County Council staff were now employed by arm's length trading companies. Mr Oakford added that the staff employed by the Council's trading companies had no impact on the Council's wage bill;
- c) asking about increasing reserves and using these to address residents' service needs, Mr Oakford advised that the situation this year with reserves was difficult and unprecedented. The County Council had to plan for financial resilience to ensure that its programmed services and improvements could be retained. Ms Cooke advised that reserves were currently at a low but adequate level. The short- and long-term impacts of the end of the pandemic upon service demands were difficult to predict, but there were a number of financial risks, for example, fewer care home places had been taken up during the pandemic but the budget needed to take account of a potential increase in demand once the pandemic had ended;
- d) concern was expressed about the nature and ongoing impact of Council Tax upon the Council's budget, representing around 70% of the Council's income. Council Tax was calculated on the value of a person's property, taking no account of the ability to pay. The economic impacts of the pandemic had brought into sharper focus households with reduced incomes who had been struggling to pay Council Tax; and
- e) lack of long-term funding for adult social care was also a significant concern, and the Government's promised white paper on the subject was still awaited. Mr Oakford advised that the County Council had previously increased its share of Council Tax by 3%, when this was permitted with the sole aim of supporting the increasing costs of delivering adult social care services in the county. The Government's long-term plans for funding adult social care were not yet known. Mr Shipton advised that the County Council, in line with many other

local authorities, included the issues of Council Tax and adult social care costs every year in its response to the Government's budget consultation, but no Government response had yet been received.

3. The Chairman paid tribute to the way in which the County Council's staff had risen to the many challenges raised by the pandemic and recorded his thanks and appreciation.

4. It was RESOLVED that:-

a) the draft capital and revenue budgets, including the responses to the budget consultation, be noted; and

b) Members' comments on the draft capital and revenue budget be reported to the Cabinet and full County Council when they consider the draft budget, on 25th January 2021 and 11th February 2021, respectively.

255. Update on Civil Society Strategy and Support to the Voluntary Sector during covid-19

(Item 7)

1. The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, Mr M Hill, introduced the report and highlighted the excellent response of the voluntary sector in supporting the people of Kent, despite the loss of income it faced as a result of the pandemic. A new Strategic Partnership Board had been established and would meet for the first time shortly. Ms Jackson added that a consultation on a draft Civil Society Strategy had been undertaken pre covid-19 and finished in April 2020, however further development of the strategy had been suspended due the pandemic but would now be revised.

2. Mr Hill, Mr Oakford and the officer team responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

a) the new Strategic Partnership Board would meet monthly and report to the Cabinet Committee every six months. Its memberships would include the chair of the VCS recovery cell put in place as part of covid recovery arrangements and representatives of the County Council, district councils and the NHS . Mr Hill undertook to share the new Board's terms of reference with the Cabinet Committee once these had been agreed at its first meeting;

b) crowdfunding was welcomed as a good proposal and should involve experienced existing organisations as well as new ones. Asked if Members would be able to participate in workshops about crowdfunding, so they could help local residents to understand the process, Ms Jackson undertook to involve them in the communications and engagement;

c) asked about Kent Savers, which aimed to avoid families using doorstep lenders, Ms Cooke advised that this sought to identify households which needed immediate financial help;

- d) many voluntary organisations were supported by the County Council by means of subsidised leases and sponsored property arrangements, and the County Council needed to be sensitive to their financial difficulties, if and when these arrangements needed to be reviewed. Mr Hill advised that he tried to ensure they were offered the best deal possible. Mr Oakford added that he hoped to be able to increase funding available to local bodies via community and Members' grants in future years, depending on future budget circumstances;
 - e) asked for clarification of match funding in relation to Crowdfunding, if the County Council would always meet match funding commitments and if this funding would have any conditions, Mr Hill undertook to look into this and report back to the Cabinet Committee. Ms Jackson stated that there would be a broad set of outcomes against the fund to identify projects that it would support but these would not be overly prescriptive. Mr Whittle added that details of crowdfunding arrangements could be shared with the committee when ready, either before or at its next meeting;
 - f) asked to comment on the financial standing and viability of some of the larger charities and hospices in Kent, in relation to whatever support the County Council could give them, Mr Hill advised that hospices were covered by a specific Government grant but the new board could look into financial risks and sustainability in the voluntary sector. Details about hospice funding could be shared with the committee, along with an update on the impact of the second wave of the pandemic;
 - g) asked about the scope to survey voluntary sector organisations to assess their financial standing, Mr Whittle advised that the Kent Community Foundation may have suitable information which the County Council could access and the Partnership Board would look at this;
 - h) asked who would decide how to spend the £1.7m emergency assistance fund, and how the additional funds mentioned in paragraph 2.4 of the report had been allocated, Ms Cooke advised that allocation of the emergency assistance fund was a decision for the Leader of the County Council, taking views from voluntary sector organisations and district councils. The additional funding had been allocated to districts to help local families in need. The County Council would be able to monitor how this funding had been spent and share this information with the Cabinet Committee; and
 - i) voluntary sector organisations worked very closely with the health and social care sectors, and Members working with these sectors needed to be included in, and kept up to date with, the information requested by earlier speakers. Ms Jackson undertook to ensure that other Members and committees were briefed on the issues raised.
3. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and in response to questions and comments be noted, including the further information requested for future meetings of the committee.

256. Facilities Management Procurement Update

(Item 8)

1. Mr Sanderson introduced the report and he and Ms Spore responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) the revised presentation of the latest report was welcomed;
- b) asked about potential risks of contracting with one large provider, and if contracts for smaller providers would use social value to help to support economic recovery, Mr Sanderson advised that the main contract would be split into individual functions which would be covered by a number of smaller suppliers. This would allow the County Council to retain more control. The small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) taking up the smaller contracts were local to Kent so their use would indeed support local economic recovery. Ms Spore added that social value was one of the evaluation criteria and confirmed that SMEs would be actively engaged to encourage them to take part in the tendering process; and
- c) asked about the structure and length of contracts, Ms Spore advised that one large and a number of small contracts allowed the County Council to spread risk as well as attract a range of local providers, and this model made the most of changes which had arisen in the market since contracts were last let. It would be easier to re-let a contract if any one provider failed to perform satisfactorily.

2. It was RESOLVED that progress on the Facilities Management Procurement be noted.

257. Construction Partnership Commission

(Item 9)

1. Ms Spore introduced the report and summarised the key points and the rationale and process for identifying the preferred option. Ms Spore and Mr Clark responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) concern was expressed that the reduced number of contractors would limit the scope for good competition. Ms Spore advised that all seven contractors had to be Kent companies and would be invited to tender for each contract, although not all were expected to do so, due to the cost of preparing each tender. It was expected that the bulk of contracts would be taken up by two or three main contractors, who would have an incentive to deliver good value. Mr Clark added that the new arrangement offered good opportunities for bidders to add social value;
- a) other government frameworks could be used, for example, the Department for Education's framework for delivering education projects; and
- b) asked about how the award of contracts on a rotation basis would allow the County Council to achieve value for money, Mr Clark advised that quantity surveyors would check the market rates to ensure that best prices were being charged. If the tender did not represent the best rate, the contract

would not be awarded. Ms Spore added that benchmarking was very important and that value for money was not solely about price but included social value.

2. It was RESOLVED that the preferred option and procurement timetable be noted, and a further report be submitted to the committee's March meeting.

258. Work Programme

(Item 10)

It was RESOLVED that, with the addition of items about the following:

- the role of the Governance and Audit Committee and
 - a review of County Council's trading companies,
- the committee's work programme for 2021 be noted

259. Motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business

It was RESOLVED that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEMS (open access to minutes)

260. Total Facilities Management Bi-annual Review

(Item 11)

1. Mr Clark introduced the report and advised that performance and customer satisfaction had both improved since the change in contractor. There were no questions.
2. It was RESOLVED that the current performance of Total Facilities Management contractors be noted.