

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Online on Monday, 14 December 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

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport) and Mr A Scott-Clark (Director of Public Health)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

190. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

There were no apologies for absence.

191. Declarations of Interest

(Item)

There were no declarations of interest.

192. Minutes of the Meetings held on 9 and 30 November 2020

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2020 and 30 November 2020 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

193. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 5)

- (1) Mrs Bell said targeted symptom-free testing was to be offered to secondary schools in Kent before Christmas. The numbers of school age children testing positive for Covid-19 had been a matter of concern and testing would assist in preventing children without symptoms passing on the virus. Existing testing infrastructure was to facilitate symptom free testing and schools were urged to support the testing programme. Additional mobile testing units were to be deployed to a small number of schools and further education colleges.

Community testing was due to begin in all districts in Kent after Christmas as part of the Covid-19 Winter Plan. There were logistical challenges in regard to the preparation of test sites, recruitment of staff and management of the equipment and IT infrastructure. Work was being done to set up sites in Thanet and Swale with assistance from military planners. Key workers and their families would be targeted first and lateral flow testing would be used.

Under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations 2020, a Christmas market which had been due to take place in Broadstairs was cancelled. An assessment of the arrangements for the event concluded concerns about the positive case rate in the local area, the scale of the event and the lack of detail in the event's risk assessment constituted a serious threat to public health.

Covid-19 local restriction tiers were being reviewed but it was anticipated that Kent would remain in Tier 3 restrictions.

- (2) Ms Chandler said throughout the pandemic, the CYPE divisional management team had undertaken planning to look after staff health and wellbeing as well as continuing with the statutory duty to safeguard children.

Ms Chandler said that there had been an increase in referrals since half term and work was being done to review the latent demand model. It was thought that there were higher levels of staff sickness and the impact had been felt more in the second wave of the pandemic. Face to face work needed to continue with children and families.

Work had been undertaken to look at how frontline staff could be supported and if staff had capacity to assist in this regard.

In the second wave of the pandemic, there had been reports of more staff sickness and staff had reported increased anxiety around completing home and school visits, particularly in Thanet and Swale where the infection rate was higher. Staff resourcing had also been an issue for staff working in Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Staff undertaking home and school visits had PPE, risk assessments had been completed for both staff and for families.

The annual Try Angle Awards were launched on 12 August and nominations were open to children and young people between the ages of 11 and 18 years old, who deserved recognition for their efforts, determination and perseverance. Award categories included achievement in the arts, sports, music and personal development. Open Access Team and Kent Youth Voice were judging the awards in each district. Planning was underway for the 'Spirit of Try Angle Awards' which would be held online.

- (3) Mr Long thanked headteachers, staff in Kent schools and KCC officers. It was acknowledged that schools were facing additional challenges and were commended for remaining focused on delivering the best education they could to students. Schools had responded to the changing guidelines and advice whilst doing what was acknowledged to be a stressful job in normal times.

The contribution of KCC staff who support the education sector and the work they had done during the Covid-19 crisis was also noted.

It was noted that schools were under significant pressure due to the rise in case of Covid-19 and increased numbers of staff falling ill or needing to self-isolate.

School and bubble closures had impacts on child safety and more widely on families and the community.

Schools had been contacted by KCC to encourage them to stay open where possible and to work collaboratively within their localities. Swale had been particularly impacted by bubble and school closures. Schools had responded by reviewing the size of bubbles and ways of working to minimise, where possible, the impact of individual cases.

School returns to the DFE suggested that most Primary schools were providing remote learning to all pupils self-isolating or absent linked to Covid-19. A small number of schools indicated they were not providing remote learning, however those contacted had confirmed this was an administrative error. All secondary schools that had been contacted had remote learning policies in place.

KCC, with the help of TEP had put together a package of support for Headteacher Wellbeing. This had been finalised in partnership with the KAH Headteacher Wellbeing Group HT to ensure that the offer was appropriate, user friendly and responded to the challenges faced by Kent Headteachers.

On 26 November 2020, KCC announced proposals to provide food vouchers to the families of children who are eligible to receive benefits-related Free School Meals ahead of the December school holidays.

The food voucher scheme was funded by part of KCC's £4.5m share of the Government's £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme. Families of children in receipt of benefits related free school meals would receive one £15 voucher per eligible child per week of the two-week December holiday, which could be spent online or instore at Asda or instore at Tesco.

KCC planned to launch a similar scheme to provide food vouchers for eligible families during the February half-term break and details were to be made available in the New Year.

Schools and colleges had been asked to provide up to date data on all families who were receiving benefits related free school meals. This was to enable Agilisys, the commissioned provider, to issue vouchers via email or text in the week commencing 30 November 2020, with the scheme completed by the 9 December. A small team had been established to ensure that queries could be resolved swiftly to ensure that the scheme was implemented, and families received their vouchers on time.

15,634 children had taken the Kent Test which had been delayed by a month to accommodate the impact of Covid-19 and the school closures that affected all children from late March this year. The vast majority of testing for pupils in Kent schools took place on 15 October and testing for out of county pupils was predominantly completed on 17, 18 and 24 October. Alternative testing arrangements were made for all pupils unable to attend because of COVID-19.

Headteacher Assessment panels took place virtually this year. This required a digital solution, which worked very well.

Results of the Kent Test were released to parents on 26 November, as planned as part of the revised timetable.

- (4) Mr Payne said that work had continued to construct an inland border facility at Sevington. The work had been impeded by poor weather conditions but they were assured that the facility would be available for DVSA and HMRC by the 1 January 2021. Highways England had tested a quick moveable barrier which was at Junction 8 and Junction 9 on the M20 and was to be put out on 29 December 2020 in time for 1 January 2021.

KCC had been given temporary enforcement powers to permit the clamping of antisocially parked HGVs in the east of Kent from 1 January 2021.

The consultation into 5 schemes of tranche 2 of the Active Travel Fund had begun and was extended to run until 19 January 2021 due to the Christmas period. It was hoped that feedback would inform the development of cleaner and safer neighbourhoods for road users and residents alike.

Mr Payne and Ms Chandler attended the official re-opening of the toll bridge at Sandwich. The swing bridge now operates to facilitate the passing of maritime traffic and with the platform extension at Sandwich railway station, the highway infrastructure is in place for the rescheduled 149th Open at Royal St George's Golf Club.

- (5) Mr Whiting said a 4 year exchange project funded by the EU and led by KCC had brought together innovative technology and creative small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kent with regions in France, the Netherlands and Belgium. Over 300 SMEs took part in seminars, events and visits and the project had concluded with 90% of businesses involved saying that it had helped with leads. This work would be taken forward through the Straits Committee.

Mr Whiting addressed an EU transition seminar organised by the Invicta Chamber of Commerce and thanks were given to the Leader and KCC staff for their assistance with the event.

Work on a new Kent Design Guide had continued to ensure a countywide framework for quality design. Positive feedback had been received from Kent's leading developers.

East Kent Opportunities – a limited liability joint venture between KCC and Thanet District Council, completed a land sale at Manston Business Park to All Access Scaffolding Ltd, a local SME business which employed around 100 people. Further land sales were to be completed assisting SMEs.

- (6) Miss Carey said the Christmas tree recycling scheme which had been successful for 8 years in the Ashford area in aid of the Pilgrim's Hospice, would be extended to Canterbury and Thanet. In exchange for a donation to the Pilgrim's Hospice, trees were collected or dropped to a collection point. Trees could also be taken to KCC Recycling Centres.

The Kent Environment Strategy Conference was held online at the end of November. The theme was: Kent 2050 - The Road to Net Zero and it launched the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy. There were some technical problems on the day of the event but the full whole event was available to watch back.

The Plan Bee Conference held its first online summit in November on Kent's pollinator action plan and updated on progress.

The attendance at the online events had demonstrated there was an appetite for information and more online events were planned, as well as to launch the environment hub on the KCC website.

LoCASE 3 had been approved by central government, expanding on LoCASE 2. There was a partnership of over 20 district, boroughs, organisations and further education colleges across the south of England with a budget of over £16 million.

- (7) Mr Hill said the John Downton Award for Young Artists event had been held virtually. The young people had displayed and talked about their work online and the standard of work was very high. The winning piece would be displayed at the Turner Contemporary.

Funding had been awarded to 3 arts projects via the Capital Kickstart grants programme: the refurbishment of the Turner Contemporary in Margate, the Tunbridge Wells Cultural and Learning Hub and to Jasmin Vardimon Company in Ashford.

- (8) Mrs Prendergast said work on the Kent Local Tracing Partnership was underway, supporting the national Test and Trace service. KCC commissioned call handlers were contacting those not reached by the government within the first 24 hours of receiving a positive Covid-19 test.

The 24 Ways in 24 Days to Protect Kent campaign promoted public health messages on social media and service messages in the run up to Christmas.

A feedback campaign had been launched asking why people are and are not complying with restrictions. 700 responses had been received and this demonstrated that people wanted to share how they felt about living in tier 3 restrictions.

The KCC Communications team had planned extensively for potential disruption in Kent due to the end of EU transition period. Work had been done with Kent Resilience Forum to ensure alignment of messages. The Contact Centre was resourced to deal with an uplift in enquiries from the public, the KCC website had been re-structured so service messages were visible, and messages would be put out on social media platforms.

- (9) Mr Oakford said the results of the public budget consultation had been received and work was being progressed on finalising the Budget for the coming year. The recent Spending Review had been better than expected and had provided KCC with time to plan and consult on future savings.

It also allowed for an in-depth review of property and the use of new technology to be conducted. There were difficult budget decisions to be made.

The Property Team had been working with colleagues in Social Care and Public Health to identify and prepare locations for the Kent Community Testing to begin.

- (10) Mr Gough said that statutory duties had been resumed in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, after these had been suspended in mid-August. At that time, the advice from the Director of Children's Services was that KCC was unable to provide a safe level of service. Caseloads had reduced and pressures were reduced but concerns remained that a sustainable national system was needed.

Concerns were raised about the alarmingly high infection rates for Covid-19 in many parts of Kent. Steps were being taken with contact tracing, testing, communications, enforcement and close working with NHS colleagues and it was the central concern of Cabinet that the numbers were reduced.

194. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - September 2020-21 (Item 6)

- 1) Mr Oakford said the report was the first forecast since the Budget amendment and reflected the situation at the end of September 2020.
- 2) There was a forecasted underspend, excluding schools and Covid-19, of £4.5 million, which was a change from the last report of £12.4 million with a previously reported overspend of £7.9million. All directorates had seen an improvement in their forecasts, with all apart from ASC reporting a forecast underspend. The forecast for CYPE had moved from an overspend of £6.7 million to an underspend of £1.1 million, which reflected a reduction in demand.
- 3) The reported Covid-19 position was an available grant of £15.4 million compared to a £17.2 million budget held corporately. The available grant was a result of underspends, most notably due to lower numbers of social care clients moving into care and a reduction in demand for home to school transport.
- 4) The Budget and Medium Term Plan relied on underspends going forward and it was emphasised that it was important not to lose sight of this going into the new financial year.
- 5) Resolved that the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report be noted.

195. Quarterly Performance Report - Quarter 2 2020/21 (Item 7)

Rachel Kennard, Senior Intelligence Analyst was in attendance for this item

- 1) Rachel Kennard outlined the report with results of 35 key performance indicators (KPIs) up to the end of September 2020. KPIs were rated red, amber or green based on the most recent performance against targets. Despite the ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic, 21 of the KPIs were 'RAG' rated as green and represented continued delivery of the Council's priorities.
- 2) There had been increased digital engagement from the public and online services were being used to access services. 7% fewer telephone calls were made to the Contact Point.
- 3) There had been improvements in timescales for referrals and services within social care and a higher proportion of adults with additional needs were living in their own homes or with family.
- 4) There were 3 areas that had been 'RAG' rated as red and performing below target. The CYPE target for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) to be issued within 20 weeks.
- 5) Under Public Health, the KPIs 'RAG' rated red related to NHS health checks and sexual health services which had been affected by the pandemic.
- 6) Mrs Chandler said that progress had been made with the number of EHCPs issued but the indicator used for the Performance Report did not show this progress. There were high levels of demand for EHCPs.
- 7) Mr Payne asked for Members to note that the submission of the Development Consent Order for the Lower Thames Crossing would happen in 2021.
- 8) Ms Bell said that Covid-19 had affected Public Health services but many services had been delivered online and it was anticipated that there would be a mixed model of virtual and face to face services moving forward.
- 9) In response to a question from the Leader, it was noted that the new regression based approach flagged those KPIs with a statistically significant trend.
- 10) Resolved that the Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 2 be noted.

196. Corporate Risk Register

(Item 8)

Mark Scrivener, Corporate Risk Manager was in attendance for this item

- 1) Mr Scrivener advised the main 'refresh' of the Corporate Risk Register was undertaken in the summer due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2) The emerging winter risks had been reported on earlier in the year and it was noted that the nature of the risks had been fluid due to the evolving situation and challenges presented by the pandemic. The risks that remained at a high level were in relation to Covid-19 and the end of the transition period for exiting the EU.

- 3) It was reported that the risk in relation to the workforce had been moved from medium to high level. Whilst the Staff Wellbeing Survey had shown staff resilience, there were concerns moving into the winter in relation to higher Covid-19 infection rates.
- 4) The Leader said that steps had been taken to manage risks in relation to 'Effectiveness of Governance within a Member-led Authority' and this area was being re-examined.
- 5) Resolved that the Corporate Risk Register be noted.

197. Sustaining the Economy Post-Lockdown

(Item 9)

David Smith, Director of Economic Development was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Whiting introduced the agenda item and wished to emphasise the effects of Covid-19 on the Kent economy, businesses and residents. Measures had been put in place to aid businesses.
- 2) Mr Smith said that Kent's largest business sector, retail and wholesale were severely impacted by the first lockdown. The near closure of the construction sector also had a severe impact on Kent's economy, due to the concentration of this industry in the county.
- 3) Public Health rules on social distancing and government restrictions had impacted on the arts, entertainment and leisure sector and this impact had worsened since the summer.
- 4) It was forecast that there would be some recovery to the Kent economy and the level of recovery would be affected by whether a Trade and Cooperation Agreement had been reached between the UK and the EU. Unemployment would be likely to lag behind the return to output growth. It was expected following a decrease in September that unemployment figures would increase due to the second lockdown.
- 5) An update was provided on the Kent and Medway Economic Renewal and Resilience Plan. Full details of support for businesses was accessible on the KCC website.
- 6) Resolved that the presentation on Sustaining the Economy Post-Lockdown be noted.

198. Spending Review

(Item 10)

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director Finance and Dave Shipton, Head of Finance Policy, Planning & Strategy, were in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Oakford said the results of the Spending Review were better than anticipated. Additional funds were 'one offs' with the exception of the opportunity to increase the adult social care precept by an additional 1%, subject to Full Council's approval. It was hoped that the government would announce the final financial settlements in December.
- 2) The Covid-19 funding, the social care grant and council tax compensation would not mean that there were not financial challenges and £90 million spending pressures for the coming year. Savings would still need to be achieved.
- 3) Mr Shipton said that there were adjustments that would be needed over the medium term as there was still a significant imbalance in the Spending Review.
- 4) Resolved that the Spending Review be noted.