

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 9 November 2021

PRESENT: Mr R J Thomas (Chair), Mr R A Marsh (Vice-Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr T Bond, Mr A Brady, Mr T Cannon, Mr N J D Chard, Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mr A J Hook), Mr G Cooke, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr J P McInroy, Mr H Rayner (Substitute for Mr M Dendor), Mr P Stepto and Dr L Sullivan

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford and Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Mr A Fawley (Principal Investment and Disposals), Mr S Hocken (Property Disposals Consultant), Ms L Jackson (Policy Manager), Ms J Johnson (Partnership and Programmes Manager), Mr S Lain-Rose (Digital Lead (Digital Inclusion & Capability)), Mr P Murphy (Infrastructure Business Partner), Ms K Ripley (Special Projects Manager), Mr J Sanderson (Head of Property Operations), Mr T Woolmer (Policy & Partnerships Adviser - Kent Public Services) and Miss T A Grayell (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

32. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr P C Cooper, Mr M Dendor and Mr A Hook.

Mr I S Chittenden was present as a substitute for Mr Hook and Mr H Rayner as a substitute for Mr Dendor.

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

(Item 3)

Mr G Cooke declared an interest in agenda item 6 as a Trustee of the Fusion Health Living Centre in Maidstone, a recipient of funding from the County Council's Public Health budget.

34. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021

(Item 4)

1. It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021 are correctly recorded and they be signed by the Chair.

2. Mr Watts advised the committee that statistics which he had undertaken to send to the committee in the discussion of the Information Governance item would be available shortly, although it had not been possible to prepare a report for today's meeting. The County Council's Annual Governance report would be considered by the Governance and Audit Committee on 30 November and would be copied also to all Members of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, and a full report on data dashboard of Freedom of Information requests would be ready for the Cabinet Committee's January meeting.

35. Facilities Management Procurement Update *(Item 5)*

1. Mr J Sanderson introduced the report and, with Ms Ripley and Mrs Spore, responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) a view was expressed that it would be useful when discussing contract awards and renewals to be able to hear the views of service users on the quality of the service delivered. Ms Ripley advised that stakeholder groups across all directorates supplied feedback;
 - b) the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) process may change in the future but the process for this procurement had started with, so would continue to use, the existing model. Mr Watts confirmed that all European Union laws would remain in force until such time as each was repealed;
 - c) the contract management process was robust and would always apply key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure performance. Members asked that this monitoring activity be reported to the Cabinet Committee so Members would have the opportunity to have an overview of it; and
 - d) it was requested that the next report to the committee contain more detailed information, in an exempt report if necessary, so Members could be more fully informed.
2. It was RESOLVED that the information set out in the report and given in response to comments and questions be noted, with thanks.

36. 21/00055 - Final draft of the Civil Society Strategy and consultation feedback *(Item 6)*

Mr G Cooke declared an interest in this item as a Trustee of the Fusion Health Living Centre in Maidstone, a recipient of funding from the County Council's Public Health budget.

1. Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, introduced the item and highlighted the comprehensive nature of the strategy for which the Cabinet Committee's support was being sought, and the need to support the voluntary sector as a vital partner in service delivery.
2. Mr Whittle and Ms Jackson responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) asked about the work of the Voluntary and Community Sector steering group, Ms Jackson advised that the group, which was not part of the County Council, acted as the local forum to engage with the sector on a wide variety of issues, including the sector's infrastructure needs. Mr Whittle undertook to email the details of the make-up and working of the group to Members after the meeting. This was welcomed as transparency around the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector and how decisions were made was important;
- a) concern was expressed that, as the operating models of various voluntary sector bodies varied, the strategy may not be able to be applied to them all in the same way. The strategy would need to recognise the diversity of the sector and protect its independence. Charities were also supported by donations, and it was important that they be able to continue to do so within the strategy. Mr Whittle confirmed that the strategy applied to the whole voluntary sector, not just those bodies from whom the Council commissioned services;
- b) a view was expressed that, to help Members' understanding of the bodies and funding processes involved, it would be helpful if future reports were to include a glossary of terms;
- c) asked how voluntary bodies would receive feedback on the effectiveness of the services they delivered on behalf of the council, Mr Whittle advised that monitoring and feedback was part of the commissioning services and was thus part of a separate process to the strategy;
- d) the Chair suggested that a Member briefing on the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector and the funding and service delivery processes would be helpful. Other Members asked that such a briefing include funding, the reciprocal support that each sector gives to the other, the extent to which the Council was reliant on the voluntary sector and how the two could ensure that the county was adequately covered in terms of service delivery. Mr Whittle advised that the strategy did not deal with service commissioning but set out an enabling framework within which future commissioning activity could occur; and
- e) responding to a question about seed funding, Ms Jackson added that funding given to the voluntary sector was indeed intended as seed funding, to help the sector to access support it would not otherwise be able to access. Crowdfunding was another way for the voluntary sector to attract funding, as part of a two-year pilot. Mr Whittle added that this was not yet included in the budget allocation as sufficient detail was not yet available, but the strategy would provide leverage for voluntary organisations to access this type of funding.

3. It was RESOLVED that:-

- a) Members' comments on the revised strategy and consultation, set out above, be noted;

- b) the committee agree that the Civil Society Strategy be adopted, that the infrastructure budget be allocated in accordance with the strategy framework, and any decisions on expenditure be made by the relevant Cabinet Members; and
- c) the proposal to take forward the actions from the Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation be noted.

37. Digital Inclusion and Capability Strategy

(Item 7)

1. Mr S Lain-Rose presented a series of slides which set out the rationale for developing the study and its key elements and design principles. Mr Woolmer highlighted the effect of the pandemic in exacerbating digital exclusion, especially for a number of sectors of the population, including older people, residents of rural areas, the homeless and people for whom English was not their first language. 1 in 3 young people did not have access to their own device. Key barriers to good digital connectivity included confidence and system capacity. Mr Woolmer, Mr Lain-Rose and Ms Z Cooke responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-

- a) the concise report and the strategy were both welcomed as being clear and inclusive, emphasising the strategy's holistic nature and emphasis on the need to respond to local needs;
- b) concern was expressed that consultation on the strategy used the internet, which immediately excluded anyone who did not have access to it. Mr Lain-Rose advised that consultation was also undertaken by use of leafleting homes, and that an engagement skills team had been tasked with engaging sectors of the population who were hard to reach. In addition, some people chose not to be online, and the aim was not to force them to engage online but to encourage them by demonstrating the benefits they would gain by doing so;
- c) asked who would have ownership of the strategy and would deliver it, and how it would be used to address identified issues, Ms Cooke advised that the stated aims of such a strategy needed to be honest and realistic, it needed to target the most in need by working with partners, such as district councils and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), for example. The most in need would include those who were unable to complete school and college work at home or were unable to access online systems to claim living benefits;
- d) it would be interesting for Members to be able to see data from districts to see how their local areas fared and to compare broadband performance in areas of the county. It was known that 96% of the county was connected to broadband but that did not mean that every area had access to fast broadband; speeds varied considerably, and account needed to be taken of residents' scope, not just to connect but to maintain a connection. The County Council could look into how it could engage with local planning authorities to encourage developers to build broadband into new housing, alongside other required infrastructure. Ms Cooke advised that countywide

analysis could be made available to Members so they could compare areas. She also advised that joint working to address broadband provision was not necessarily an issue of funding but of good partnership working. Kent was unique as a local authority in that it had the Kent Public Service Network (KPSN), which could help greatly in addressing digital inclusion;

- e) currently, fewer than 0.2% of GP appointments were conducted online, and to be able to show an increase in this would be a demonstration of the value of increased digital inclusion. Similarly, telecare was not yet being used to its full capability but would be another way of showing residents the benefits which could be gained from using technology;
- f) concern was expressed that some people could feel pressured to use online services where they might find that difficult, for example, having a medical consultation online rather than in person. For many, face-to-face engagement was the only way they felt able to tackle health and personal issues, even if an online appointment would be quicker to arrange. People would need to be confident that they could still expect to get good service without using online methods. Mr Woolmer reassured the committee that the strategy set out principles and priorities and sought to build awareness rather than impose new behaviours. There were already good links with CCGs, Job Centres, etc. Ms Cooke advised that face-to-face transactions cost more than online ones, so the strategy sought to make people aware of this rather than to impose any specific behaviour; and
- g) asked about the spend so far on rolling out digital inclusion, for example, in identifying and addressing barriers such as skills shortages, and how the new role of Director of Technology would lead the roll-out, Mr Lain-Rose advised that, from an allocation of £1.5m, £71,000 had been spent so far, and he undertook to provide more detailed information about the breakdown of the spend to the committee after the meeting. Ms Cooke advised that the new Director of Technology would lead on County Council technological development and would work with the KPSN.

2. It was suggested that updates on the development roll-out of the strategy be submitted to the committee annually, and it was planned that these would start in June 2022.

3. It was RESOLVED that the development of a corporate strategy for digital inclusion and capability which is:

- a) led by the County Council's Digital Lead (Digital Inclusion and Capability);
- b) corporately owned by Strategic and Corporate Services, as outlined in Section 2 of the report; and
- c) designed based on the principles outlined in Section 3 of the report,

be endorsed, and that detailed update reports be submitted to the committee on an annual basis.

38. Kent Connects Partnership Update

(Item 8)

1. Mr P Murphy and Ms J Johnson introduced the report and responded to comments and questions from the committee, including the following:-
 - a) asked how and when NHS partners would join in, Ms Johnson advised that the partnership would seek to engage health IT partners and start to have conversations about data sharing. Mrs Spore added that health was a key part of the partnership in terms of data sharing of health and care records and that health partners were successfully sharing data to support this link;
 - b) asked how the partnership identified work needing to be done, Mr Murphy advised that ideas came from working groups within the partnership but would also be welcome from Members, who could propose a piece of work to be considered; and
 - c) it was suggested that a report on cybersecurity and resilience be submitted to the committee's March 2022 meeting.
2. It was RESOLVED that progress to date and the development of the partnership be noted, with thanks, and a report on cybersecurity and resilience be submitted to the committee's March 2022 meeting.

39. Work Programme 2022

(Item 9)

1. The Chair referred to the large number of key decisions which were listed for discussion at the January meeting and asked the committee to consider if it wished to convene the Property Sub-Committee to consider them, or to have an extra meeting of the whole committee. It was suggested that one all-day meeting be held in January to accommodate the business. *Some decisions were subsequently postponed and the remaining business for January could therefore be accommodated in one half-day meeting.*
2. Items discussed at today's meeting for which future updates were planned would be added to the work programme for the appropriate meetings.
3. Taking account of these adjustments, it was RESOLVED that the committee's planned work programme for 2022 be agreed.

40. 21/00100 - Disposal of Land South of Steele Avenue, Greenhithe, Dartford, DA9 9AE

(Item 10)

1. Mr Fawley gave a brief introduction to the item, referring to the information set out in the unrestricted report. The Chair asked Members if they wished to refer to the information set out in the exempt appendix to the report and Members confirmed that they did. Discussion therefore continued in closed session.

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

The committee 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 paragraphs 3 and 5 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

EXEMPT ITEMS

Open access to minute 42, summary of minute 43
(where access to that minute remains restricted)

42. 21/00100 - Disposal of Land South of Steele Avenue, Greenhithe, Dartford, DA9 9AE

(Item 10)

1. Mr Fawley introduced the report and presented a series of slides which set out the background to the current proposal, financial details and the planned timetable. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, Mr P Oakford, emphasised that the main aim of the disposal was, as ever, to maximise the value of the site and secure the best possible return for public money.

2. Mr Fawley and Mr Hocken responded to questions of detail from the committee, including options for tenure of the site and length of lease, site valuation and monitoring of the build costs.

3. Mrs Spore clarified that the preferred option, from those set out in the exempt report, was option d) (also set out in paragraph 4.1.3 of the unrestricted report) rather than option c), as stated in error.

4. The Chair suggested that, as in similar previous proposals (for example, minute 30 of the 22 September 2021 meeting), wording could be added to the recommendation in the open report as follows '*...on the most advantageous terms for the County Council that it is able to secure*' This was accepted by the committee.

5. It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to agree to complete the disposal of the land south of Steele Avenue, King Edward Road, Dartford, and delegate authority to:

1. The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the contractual terms of the disposal, set out as option d) in the exempt report and in paragraph 4.1.3 of the unrestricted report; and
2. The Director of Infrastructure, to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above, on the most advantageous terms for the County Council that it is able to secure,

be endorsed.

43. 21/00099 - Works at Tennyson Lodge and Thomas Place, Maidstone
(Item 11)

1. Mr Oakford introduced the item and highlighted the background and complexity of the issue to be addressed. Mr J Sanderson then introduced the exempt report and, with Mr Oakford and Mrs Spore, responded to comments and questions of detail from the committee.

2. The committee then discussed the recommendation in the exempt report, which asked the committee to endorse or make recommendations to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services on the proposed decision set out in the decision paperwork appended to the report and set out below.

3. Mr H Rayner proposed, seconded by Mr R A Marsh, that rectification works proceed but the County Council hold back on any agreement pending further scrutiny to see how the situation develops vis a vis the Secretary of State's direction regarding lessees being burdened with costs.

On being put to the vote, this was defeated by 7 votes to 2.

4. Mr R C Love then proposed, seconded by Mr G Cooke, that the committee recommend to the Cabinet Member that he proceed in accordance with the recommendation in section 6 of the report but ask that he investigate any impact of the latest Ministerial statement.

On being put to the vote, this was carried by 10 votes to 0.

5. It was RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to progress the required works and related activity, as set out in the exempt report, and delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services and KCC General Counsel, to take necessary actions, including, but not limited to, entering into any contracts and legal agreements required to deliver the works,

be endorsed, but that he be asked to investigate any impact of the latest Ministerial statement.