

From: Roger Gough, Leader of the Council
David Cockburn, Corporate Director Strategic and Corporate Services and Head of Paid Service

To: County Council, 26th May 2022

Subject: ‘*Framing Kent’s Future*’ – Our Council Strategy 2022-2026

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway: County Council (16.12.21), CMM (17.01.22), CMT (01.03.22), Corporate Board (03.05.22), Cabinet (16.05.22)

Future Pathway: None

Summary: ‘*Framing Kent’s Future* – Our Council Strategy 2022-2026’ is Kent County Council’s new Strategic Statement. Development of the document has been informed by Member priorities and engagement with key partners and stakeholders. The strategy sets out the challenges and opportunities Kent is faced with and the actions we will prioritise to address them over the next four years.

Recommendation(s): County Council is asked to:

(1) **Approve** ‘*Framing Kent’s Future: Our Council Strategy 2022-2026*’.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2019/20, KCC’s 5 Year Plan ‘Kent’s Future, Our Priority’ was developed, informed by nine months of engagement and consultation with residents, businesses and partners. This was not endorsed by the County Council due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and development of the Strategic Statement was paused to allow KCC to focus on the immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis and take stock of the changing circumstances.
- 1.2 As the pandemic developed, it became clear that its impacts would be significant, and an interim plan would be required to respond to the short to medium-term challenges and opportunities. ‘Setting the Course’ Kent County Council’s Interim Strategic Plan set the focus for the council to enable us to support the county to recover, build resilience and reset. The Plan was endorsed by County Council in December 2020.
- 1.3 The Interim Strategic Plan was designed to cover a period of 18 months to oversee KCC’s response to the Covid pandemic and recovery. Work began in late 2021 to develop a new four-year Strategic Statement that would reflect the

priorities of the administration given the changed context within which we are living and working.

- 1.4 The aim of '*Framing Kent's Future*' is to set priorities that ensure we are harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges being faced by KCC as an organisation, but more importantly by the residents of Kent, over the next four years (2022-2026).
- 1.5 A paper was published for the County Council meeting in December 2021 (which was subsequently cancelled due to emergence of the Omicron Covid-19 variant), to start engagement with Members about the strategic challenges and opportunities faced by Kent and KCC that the council will need to respond to in the coming years and that must be reflected in the new strategy.

2. '**FRAMING KENT'S FUTURE: OUR COUNCIL STRATEGY 2022-2026**'

- 2.1 '*Framing Kent's Future: Our Council Strategy 2022-2026*' is attached as **Appendix A**. It was endorsed by Cabinet on 16 May, following minuted agreement to make two specific minor wording changes which have now been made, and recommended to County Council for approval.
- 2.2 The document is structured around four key priorities. These are the priorities that KCC will deliver for Kent over the next four years. They have been shaped by the challenges and opportunities Kent faces and by the ideas and feedback we have received from Members, partners, and stakeholders. They are:
 - Levelling Up Kent
 - Infrastructure for Communities
 - Environmental Step Change
 - New Models of Care and Support
- 2.3 Each priority is supported by a set of commitments. For each commitment, there is an introductory paragraph that explains why this is important to Kent and outlines key drivers, challenges and opportunities. Each commitment then has a number of 'we will' statements that set out specific actions that KCC, along with our partners, will take in order to deliver the commitment.
- 2.4 As well as the four priorities, other important sections of the strategy include:
 - **Kent's Strategic Context** – Following the *Leader's Foreword*, this is the first section of the document. It sets out some of the main factors that make Kent the place it is, and that have shaped the priorities set out in the strategy. These include opportunities and challenges generated by Kent's unique geography, sociology and economy as well as those that arise from national and global pressures.

- **Our Response** – Following *Kent's Strategic Context*, the *Our Response* section outlines how we will work differently as a Council and with Kent residents and partners to respond to the challenges and opportunities that Kent faces over the next four years.
- **Corporate Equality Objectives** – As part of our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), we must develop and publish our Corporate Equality Objectives. A set of six objectives have been developed and included up front in the strategy.
- **How will we know we are on track** – This is the final section of the strategy. It sets out the mechanisms that we will use to measure progress and tell us how we are doing as we work with our partners towards meeting the priorities and commitments we have set out.

3. ENGAGEMENT

- 3.1 The key sections of the strategy, in particular the priorities and commitments, have been shaped through cross-party engagement with KCC Members and with senior officers.
- 3.2 All political groups were invited to engage individually at an early stage in the development of the strategy. This was followed by an in-person cross-party workshop where Members provided useful comments and feedback on an early outline of the draft priorities. A full summary of the draft was presented to and discussed with Conservative Group and circulated to all Members for comment.
- 3.3 As well as engagement with KCC Members, Parish Councils have been engaged via the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) Area Chairs Committee.
- 3.4 Key stakeholders and partners have been engaged via KCC's Staff Groups and Trade Unions, the Integrated Care System (ICS) Partnership Board, Voluntary and Community Sector Steering Group, 'Brand Kent' partners, which includes representatives from Visit Kent, Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, and representatives from Kent's universities.
- 3.5 Over 250 separate comments and suggestions on the summary draft were received through the engagement activity. These have been carefully analysed and used to inform the final version of the strategy which is presented to Cabinet in this paper.
- 3.6 The table below sets out the themes and issues that were raised most frequently by stakeholders and how these were responded to in the final version:

Key issue	Response
Impact of border/gateway to Europe issues on the county and need to address them	The need to address border impacts has been further emphasised in the <i>Kent's Strategic Context and Our Response</i> sections and the commitment on economic development (Priority 1).
The importance of strong partnership working , including with Parish Councils	KCC's commitment to strengthening its partnership working is set out in <i>Our Response</i> and throughout the commitments where relevant.
Inclusion of and importance given to the Corporate Equality Objectives welcomed	Corporate Equality Objectives are a prominent part of the section <i>Our Response</i> .
Strong support for a new approach to commissioning	This is set out in <i>Our Response</i> and has been strengthened in a specific commitment on commissioning in Priority 4.
The importance of data and the value of qualitative data	The value of qualitative data has been referenced in the point on understanding needs in <i>Our Response</i> .
Support for preventative approaches	The value of data to understand the impact of preventative approaches has been added to the point on understanding needs in <i>Our Response</i> . Preventative approaches are included in the commitments where appropriate, for example in the commitment on health inequalities (Priority 1).
Need for a realistic understanding of and response to the context and challenges	The <i>Kent's Strategic Context and Our Response</i> sections have been refocused to reflect this, and the introductory sections for each commitment aim to provide a realistic overview of the issue.
Prominence of the environment (as one of the priorities) welcomed	Noted - <i>Environmental Step Change</i> is one of the four Priorities.
Queries around the specific commitment for deprived communities in coastal areas	While it is acknowledged that there are deprived communities across Kent, there is strong national and local emphasis on coastal communities that KCC must respond to, which is why this commitment has been retained.
Inclusion of health inequalities and public health in the Levelling Up priority welcomed	Noted - the commitment on health inequalities acknowledges that the health of the population is an essential component of a successful county.
Infrastructure First commitment well supported	Noted - this is the first commitment in Priority 2 and has been strengthened based on feedback.

Need to reflect and address digital exclusion	The importance of digital inclusion has been added to <i>Our Response</i> and the commitment on digital connectivity and access (Priority 2).
Importance of regenerating town centres	This has been reflected in <i>Kent's Strategic Context</i> and strengthened in the commitment on economic development (Priority 1).
Need to protect productive farmland	This has been reflected in the commitment on supporting rural areas (Priority 2).
Interest in Kent pursuing nuclear energy generation options	The commitment in Priority 3 on carbon zero energy production now includes a specific point on the potential to explore nuclear energy generation in the county.
Strong support for KCC's role as partner in the Integrated Care System (ICS) and commitments around integration	KCC's commitment to the ICS is set out in Priority 4, the health inequalities commitment in Priority 1 and reflected in the commitments to improve partnership working and find better ways to deliver services in <i>Our Response</i> .

4. CORPORATE EQUALITY OBJECTIVES AND EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 As part of our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) a set of six Corporate Equality Objectives have been developed for the council for 2022-2026. These have been shaped through engagement with the Corporate Management Team, the Corporate Equality Group, and KCC's Trade Union and Staff Groups.
- 4.2 Previously, KCC's Corporate Equality Objectives have been published separately to the Strategic Statements, but given they are a key element of the Council's activity and are integral to the way that we work, it was agreed that they should be incorporated into the new strategy and this has been welcomed by stakeholders.
- 4.3 The Corporate Equality Objectives are:
- Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour.
 - Attract and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation which reflects the communities that KCC serves.
 - Strengthen our equality data collection and analysis across our services to better understand people's needs and the cumulative impact of the council's actions on people with protected characteristics.

- Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities.
 - Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies.
 - Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded.
- 4.4 An assessment framework will be developed to set out how the objectives will be measured over the course of the strategy and as part of the PSED statutory annual reporting.
- 4.5 An Equality Impact Assessment on '*Framing Kent's Future*' has been completed and is attached as **Appendix B**. The conclusion of the assessment is that no change is required. The evidence suggests that there is no potential for discrimination and all appropriate measures have been taken to advance equality and foster good relations between the protected groups. There is the potential for the strategy to have a positive impact on people from the protected characteristic groups through aiming to improve quality of life for people in Kent.
- 4.6 Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team will set the expectation that any specific proposals, projects or changes undertaken to deliver the priorities of the strategy requiring a Key Decision will be subject to individual equality impact assessments and action as needed.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Subject to County Council approval, '*Framing Kent's Future*' will be published on KCC's website and promoted to residents, partners and staff through KCC's communication channels.
- 5.2 The final section of the strategy explains how the priorities and commitments will be delivered and monitored. The strategy is the top level of the Council's strategic planning framework and will inform Divisional and Service plans that sit below it to ensure that the commitments are delivered by the relevant service.
- 5.3 The scope of the Strategic Reset Programme will be reviewed to ensure the key priorities set out in the strategy are driving its activity and the Programme is providing oversight of the major cross-cutting change programmes that the council needs to implement to deliver its priorities.
- 5.4 It is proposed that there will be a review of the Quarterly Performance Report to ensure that it is aligned with the commitments in the new strategy to allow regular monitoring of progress to be managed through the existing performance management arrangements. This will support Member oversight through the Council's established governance channels. Cabinet will receive regular updates on performance, and within the scope of their remit, Cabinet Committees will be

able to have oversight of how specific programmes and projects are progressing.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The recommendations are as follows:

County Council is asked to:

(1) Approve <i>'Framing Kent's Future: Our Council Strategy 2022-2026'</i> .

7. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

7.1 Appendices for this item:

Appendix A – *'Framing Kent's Future: Our Council Strategy 2022-2026'*

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment for *'Framing Kent's Future'*

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