

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 16 May 2022.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr D L Brazier, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mrs S Prendergast and Mr B J Sweetland

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the Meetings held on 31 March 2022 and 21 April 2022

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 31 March 2022 and 21 April 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said the Covid-19 routine symptom-free testing had ended at the beginning of April 2022 so KCC was reliant on a handful of indicators for Covid-19 surveillance, such as the national Covid-19 Infection Survey which only reported at south east level. Overall, indicators had shown declining trends in both infection rates and of patients in hospital with or because of Covid-19.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Survey figures up to the 30 April for the south east of England showed an estimated 2.2% of the population were infected with Covid-19, half the rate that had been recorded on 19 April. ONS rates by age showed infections were higher in older people, with 2.8% of over 50s infected compared to 1% of secondary education age children and 1.3% of primary education age children.

The number of care home staff and residents testing positive had continued to fall. The rolling 7-day average positive test count on 2 May was 5.4% for staff and 4.1% for residents.

People in hospital with Covid-19 had remained steady at 150 per day, down from 450 in late March 2022 and the majority were aged over 55. A daily average of 5 mechanically ventilated hospital beds were in use by Covid patients over the previous week. Weekly deaths from Covid-19 had continued to be at a nominal level. Sample sequencing for Kent showed BA.2 as the dominant strain.

The adult social care white paper was discussed at the last meeting of Cabinet. The Leader and Mrs Bell had written to Kent's MPs sharing the Cabinet report, asking them to support the call for adequate funding for the reforms and sharing the view that consideration should be given to delaying the implementation of the reforms by 6 months.

Mental Health Awareness Week took place between 9 and 15 May 2022 with the theme of 'loneliness'. Community Support Services, Live Well Kent and Kent Sheds reminded residents of the help available and activities took place online and in person at various locations across the county.

Live Well Kent is a network of community mental health and wellbeing support services delivered by charities, Porchlight and Shaw Trust, for KCC and NHS Kent and Medway CCG. The Kent Sheds Programme was set up specifically to combat loneliness, social isolation and mental health problems. KCC's Mental Health Champions, Andrew Kennedy and Jordan Meade, visited Sheds in Faversham and West Malling. Information on the support available was on KCC's website at kent.gov.uk/everymindmatters

2) Mrs Chandler said she had the opportunity to meet the Children's Social Work Teams in Swale and Gravesham and had listened to some of the issue that social workers were facing. The impact of Covid-19 and lockdowns were still being felt by frontline workers. The Covid-19 pandemic had taken a toll on children and families and this was reflected in the complexity of cases. Other agencies were only just returning to full capacity and were also still impacted by the pandemic. A letter had been written by Baroness Hallett, the Chair of the Covid-19 public inquiry to the Prime Minister asking for the Terms of Reference to be expanded to include the impact on children and young people. Thanks were given to KCC's Children's Social Work Teams for their continued hard work and dedication.

Ofsted were carrying out a routine inspection of KCC's Children's Services.

Thanks were given to Caroline Smith and her team for their organisation of the Education, Training and Employment Care Leaver event on 28 April 2022. As Corporate Parents, KCC supported over 2000 care leavers and it was a fantastic opportunity to be joined by some of those at the beginning of their careers and to look at how to support these young adults to fulfil their full potential. KCC was also present as an employer together with many external businesses and pledges were made by all those attending, some corporate and others personal. For example, one young person was given sponsorship for his kit having joined a football academy.

The Children's, Young People and Education (CYPE) directorate had supported Mental Health Awareness Week by championing the app for Kooth, a widely used online mental wellbeing community.

Matt Dunkley, Director of CYPE, was to retire. Mrs Chandler and the Leader expressed their thanks and appreciation for the work he had done as Director.

3) Mrs Prendergast said thanks to Matt Dunkley and wished him well for his retirement.

KCC had challenges regarding the overspend on the high needs dedicated schools grant, used to support children with SEN. There was an accumulated overspend of over £100 million. KCC had been invited to take part in a 'safety valve' intervention programme conducted by the Department for Education (DfE). The programme was intended to support those councils with the highest High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant deficits in the development of a deficit recovery plan, aimed at reforming the high needs system and moving the local authority to a sustainable footing as quickly as possible, along with agreeing additional funding to help pay off the deficit.

The initial meeting with the DfE was expected to take place by the end of May 2022 and would inform KCC's approach in both the further development of the plan, aligning it with the SEN Strategy and finalising the financial agreement with the DfE in the coming months.

KCC was taking the lead in developing a co-constructed action plan to help young people achieve their goals after they leave school by providing better pathways to post-16 education, skills and training. This followed the in depth review into the post-16 offer in the county commissioned by KCC to develop a shared and deeper understanding of the issues facing both young people and education, skills and training providers. Students, their parents, schools, colleges and training providers were amongst the many people who took part in the interviews, surveys and consultation work of the review. The findings from the review offered a unique and up-to-date insight into the challenges and experiences of young people and post-16 providers. Mrs Prendergast had been very encouraged by the participation in the review and the response to the findings, conclusions and recommendations. There was a clear desire and commitment across the sector to look afresh at post-16 qualifications. The DfE had published a list of qualifications which were at risk due to overlap with T-levels. Collaboration was important in improving the offer and experience for young people.

Families had continued to arrive in Kent through the Ukraine Family Scheme and Homes for Ukraine. Schools' admission guidance had been provided to schools and KCC's admission team was supporting individual cases as appropriate. Wider guidance was also available through The Education People. KCC was awaiting further information from the DfE about the funding of education for Ukrainian arrivals.

There was a virtual briefing held for School Governors to outline the key points from the Schools' white paper. There was a lot of interest from governors, seeking clarification on the implications of the paper on schools.

4) Mr Brazier said he had spent much of his time on the plans to reduce subsidies for bus services that the operators do not find to be profitable. KCC had been using its expertise to help schools and others affected by further proposed withdrawals by bus operators which were to take effect in the forthcoming weeks. Bus services to the Spires Academy had been successfully arranged, which otherwise would have been without any services. This was achieved without any cost to KCC.

Mr Brazier visited Dartford to inspect and ride on one of the new electric buses which were to replace the diesel fuelled buses operating the Fasttrack Thameside service and that will comprise the Fastrack bus services from Dover, the infrastructure for which was proceeding at pace.

Mr Brazier met with the Leader, officers and Members of Canterbury City Council to discuss the Local Plan and the radical infrastructure necessary for the Local Plan's implementation.

There were plans to improve Highways and Transport communications with residents. As part of the Live Labs programme of innovation, KCC had engaged with residents and parish councils to determine what they want from an online reporting tool and a prototype had been designed, named Community Central. There would be a 3-month pilot. The totally new and fully functioning reporting tool would be rolled out in due course.

The difficulties on Kent's highways caused by the lack of ferry capacity at Dover and other phenomena had been monitored. There had been lengthy discussions with the management at the Port of Dover about how to make smoother the movement of HGVs within the Port and how to fund the Port's proposals. Mr Brazier and the Corporate Director for Growth, Economic Development and Transport had met with Highways England, Dover District Council and the MP for Dover at a workshop to discuss improvements to access the town from the A2.

Interviews to appoint a Director of Highways and Transport had taken place and an announcement would be made.

5) Miss Carey said the official opening of the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Allington was on 5 May and it was opened to the public on 9 May. 129 residents visited the site on the opening day and bookings had been at around 100 a day. There was capacity for more than 100 visits a day and it was hoped that as news about the new site circulates, there will be more users as it is in a very convenient location and provided a good user experience. The Centre had been nominated for an award, 'best use of design and technology in a waste management facility' at the Letsrecycle Awards for Excellence.

The Solar Together Team were responsible for collective buying of solar panels and battery storage from solar panels and the scheme had been promoted across Kent. The benefit of scale meant that Kent householders were able to obtain these items for less and there had been over 2000 households that had signed contracts to install solar panels and batteries. There was demand from Kent householders who wanted to take advantage of the scheme and it was hoped that there would be other similar schemes in the future.

The new Director of Environment and Waste, Matthew Smyth was welcomed.

6) Mr Murphy said he and the Leader had attended the Business Vision Live event at the County Showground where there were over 400 business stands. It was a very good event with marketing managers, directors and human resources. There were good presentations from Ashford Borough Council and Medway Council about the ways in which they were changing their areas and the new industries being attracted to the areas. There were 3 awards for best stands, of which 2 were awarded to KCC; KCC Libraries and KCC Digital Services stands.

Panattoni had received a top ranking from Property EU for the completion of 74 million ft² of warehouse space over the previous 3 years. Panattoni were constructing warehouse space at Aylesford.

On 13 May, Mr Murphy visited the Workers' League co-working hub in Whitstable. The space was being used in an interesting way with people renting desks and used in the evening as a meeting place for events as well as a restaurant with a licensed bar.

14 Blue Flags were issued by Keep Britain Tidy to beaches in Kent. Dymchurch beach won the Seaside Award for the first time ever. This was good news for the tourist economy.

Greg Hands, Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth had written to Damien Collins, MP welcoming a meeting to discuss the possibilities of Dungeness becoming a site for the new Rolls Royce small modular reactors. Miss Carey also had a meeting with Kwasi Kwarteng, Secretary of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

7) Mr Hill said the new cultural hub at Tunbridge Wells was opened on 28 April. The Amelia Scott Centre was opened by her great niece, Helen Boyce and offered a new library, museum, archive space, register office, tourist information centre and education centre. It had been a complicated project which had involved temporary relocation of the library and adult education services. Congratulations were given to all involved with the project.

It had been announced that Lullingstone Country Park had been chosen as part of a nationwide network of ancient woodlands to be dedicated to The Queen's Green Canopy in celebration of her Platinum Jubilee. The Queen's Green Canopy consists of 70 ancient woodlands and 70 ancient trees across the UK which will form part of the Ancient Canopy to celebrate Her Majesty's 70 years of service.

8) Mr Sweetland said that at the meeting of Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 10 May, Members were given an update on the success of KCC supporting apprenticeships in the county. In the financial year 2021-22, KCC had offered 170 apprenticeships spread across all levels of qualification and we also shared a significant proportion of apprenticeships with 84 other employers in Kent. As an employer, KCC was committed to increasing apprenticeship numbers, including those aged between 16 and 18. 24 new employers had applied to share the levy to support another 108 apprentices to gain qualifications.

With financial difficulties for residents, largely outside of their control, Kent Together had been providing a telephone hotline. The hotline provided advice about what support was available.

It was, as noted, Mental Health Awareness Week between 9 and 15 May and managers have been encouraged to continue to engage with their teams to discuss their mental health and wellbeing. A wide range of support mechanisms were in place to make sure staff remained healthy and able to provide excellent services to residents across Kent. Communications around Mental Health Awareness Week had raised awareness at KCC and all information was on the KCC website and also from the E-newsletter.

4. Strategic Statement (Item 5)

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance and Jenny Dixon-Sherreard were in attendance for this item

1) The Leader introduced the agenda item.

2) Mr Whittle outlined the report. The draft Strategic Statement built on the work of the interim 5-year plan. There were challenges for KCC around commissioning, the environment and the place and space agenda. It was felt that this was the first Strategic Statement where delivery of priorities was to be carried out through others and by others.

Engagement in the process of drafting the Statement had been significant, and feedback had been reflected on and changes had been made. It had been identified through engagement that staff wanted to see equality considerations foremost in planning arrangements and the corporate equality objectives which were a statutory duty had been included. County Council will be considering the item next week and subject to its approval, an assessment framework was being developed in order to oversee the delivery.

Thanks were given to the team who had worked on the draft Strategic Statement.

3) Further to comments and questions from Members, it was noted:

- Preventative work would be one of the biggest challenges and partnership work would be important moving forward.
- The corporate equality objectives had been included at the start of the statement and this reflected their importance.
- KCC formally acknowledged the Environment and Climate Emergency in 2019; both before and subsequent to this, the local authority had been a key partner.

4) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report subject to the wording at point 8 of Priority 3 being clarified to reflect that this refers to household waste and the additional amendment above.

5. Schools White Paper

(Item 6)

Christine McInnes, Director for Education and Mark Walker, Director for SEND were in attendance for this item.

1) Mrs Prendergast introduced the report.

2) Ms McInnes outlined the presentation (attached).

3) Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted:

- The ambition was that all schools would be involved in an academisation process by 2030. The government was altering policy to facilitate this and there would be implications for school funding. Comments were made about the provisions for local authorities to establish multi-academy trusts and it was

noted that establishing these had been difficult in the past. It was questioned what the government's thinking was around developing capacity and structures in that sector.

- KCC had more single academies, rather than larger academy trusts. The government had not developed its thinking around models for academies and it was right to pilot some models to help form the thinking. For example, some authorities had groups of academies that had formed a cooperative rather than a chief executive model. The Department for Education (DfE) was to publish a more detailed note around this.
- The proposed role of Schools' Funding Forum would be involved with the supplementary funding or high needs funding, if a national funding formula was applied.
- The 'local' nature of academy trusts was supported by the DfE and the phrase 'family of academies' was being used. There was a lot of anxiety where there was not a link through the academy governance structure with the community. This was to be addressed through the trust standards.
- The white paper suggested protection for grammar schools and the selective nature of grammar schools. There were existing academy trusts in Kent that were a mixture of selective and non-selective schools, as well as informal partnerships between other selective and non-selective schools.
- It was felt KCC would be in a good position to shape what was coming forward through participation in DfE pilot schemes.

4) RESOLVED to note the presentation.

6. SEND Green Paper

(Item 7)

Mark Walker, Director for SEND was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Walker outlined the presentation (attached).

2) Mrs Chandler outlined the second part of the presentation.

3) Further to comments and questions, it was noted:

- It was acknowledged there had been difficulties in the past with regard to SEND policies in Kent. The green paper outlined that there would be clarification of roles and responsibilities and shared accountability across partners. KCC's consultation response was to support shared accountability and propose how this might work to the benefit of children.
- There would be an update brought to Cabinet following the engagement process.

4) RESOLVED to note the presentation.

7. Findings from New Philanthropy Capital Research - Full Cost Recovery and commissioning the VCSE

(Item 8)

Lydia Jackson, Policy and Relationships Officer (VCS); David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance; Ben Watts, General Counsel; Josephine McCartney, Chief Executive of Kent Community Foundation

1) Mr Hill introduced the report.

2) Mr Whittle outlined the report. This was the first in-depth research work that had been conducted on this matter and it had attracted attention nationally from the wider public sector and from government. The research had highlighted challenges concerning consistency of practice, cost and quality. Also highlighted were challenges for the voluntary sector to respond to around behaviour, price, whether it appropriately shared risk and the responsibility of not meeting full cost recovery.

Strategic opportunities had been highlighted for KCC in how it conducts procurement moving forward and the building of strategic partnerships. Also, there were opportunities to come out of the recent procurement green paper.

The VCSE Steering Group was important in taking this work forward.

3) Mrs McCartney thanked KCC for work on this area and said it had highlighted the overall issues in the relationship with the voluntary sector and local authorities. Kent had led the way on addressing these issues and it was hoped that other local authorities and parts of the sector would also pick this up. The Steering Group had provided a forum for challenges to be shared and to open a more open relationship.

4) Ms Maynard said the research was welcomed and it was an exciting opportunity to make sure that existing commissioning activities remained fit for purpose. It had been positive to see many good examples of commissioning and contract management, where there had been a partnership ethos and mutual respect and understanding. Work was underway to adopt good practices into commissioning standards across the organisation to ensure consistency of approach and delivery to a high standard.

5) Further to comments and questions, it was noted:

- There were challenges in not reinforcing previous behaviours and in deciding the next steps so that changes could be evidenced. There would be monitoring arrangements put in place and work would be ongoing with regard to commissioning standards. A reporting mechanism would be put in place to the relevant Cabinet Committee and alignment with the Civic Society Strategy would be considered.
- There was an impact from the findings of the research on Cabinet Members' decisions moving forward and given the commitments made.

6) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.

8. Procurement of an E-voucher Distribution Provider (Item 9)

David Adams, Reconnect Programme Manager was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report.

2) Mr Adams outlined the report. Thanks were given to officers across KCC for their support in accommodating a tight deadline in order that support could be delivered in the summer. A lead-in time was required where the support was provided via schools. The proposed contract period was for 3 years with 2 potential 1-year extensions.

3) Further to comments from Members, it was noted:

- There would need to be full reporting on progress on this important piece of work.

4) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.