

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 21 July 2022.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Jeffrey

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2022

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said the heatwave had brought the expected challenges with additional demand on the NHS, traffic queues and concurrent issues across the water network which saw some areas without water and some wildfires caused by or exacerbated by the heat. KCC led the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) response including communications to ensure timely and consistent messages. Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health conducted several media interviews to promote advice about staying safe. It was forecast for the temperature to rise again towards the weekend. It was approaching the end of the school term and the start of the 'summer getaway' so KCC was working with KRF to manage the expected pressures on the road network as well as making sure people remained safe and well as they travelled through and to Kent.

Bird Flu was circulating in Kent and there was the largest outbreak on record among sea birds. This was of concern as sea birds had more regular interaction with humans and domestic animals. There was evidence that Bird Flu was spreading in other wildlife such as foxes and there were concerns there could be spread to domestic animals such as dogs. The spread was thought to be slowing as migratory birds had died or moved on with their young but the virus could spread to non-migratory flocks so it was important to take precautionary action. Posters and social media content had been circulated to affected areas and while it was important to inform residents and tourists, KCC wanted to reassure and encourage visitors to the

Kent coast this summer. People were advised not to handle sick or dead birds or allow dogs near to any dead birds.

KCC was supporting the alcohol awareness campaign, Know Your Score which was running to end of July and the Better Health summer campaign, Shake Up Your Summer aiming to get families with young children more active with 10-minute 'Shake Up' games.

2) Mrs Prendergast said that the first Key Stage 2 attainment statistics since 2019 had recently been published, covering the attainment of year 6 pupils. Sadly but not unexpectedly, 59% of pupils were assessed to be meeting the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths, down from 65% in 2019.

The Schools' Bill had proved controversial, with a significant number of amendments made as it progressed through the House of Lords. KCC was submitting an expression of interest in participating in the "test and learn" phase of the government plans to promote Local Authority established Multi Academy Trusts. Whether KCC were successful or not, officers were to work with the Kent Association of Headteachers to engage the range of providers in the education sector to consider options related to the Schools Bill.

There had been an update on the locally commissioned review of 16-19 provision - Pathways for All. Members were urged to read the summary, if not the document in full. Mrs Prendergast had recently met with Simon Cook, Chief Executive of Mid Kent college and visited their campus in Maidstone. Information was shared on the breadth of their offer, future plans and there was an opportunity to talk with some students.

Kent's three Further Education (FE) colleges educated 25,470 students and like other education settings, had to support them both during and post pandemic. Mrs Prendergast was really pleased to find out more about this work through a letter from Lucy McLeod, Chief Education Officer at the EKC Group, about the very positive impact of the Covid Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) funding which was distributed across Kent last year. They had expanded 1:1 and group counselling, established a wide range of additional clubs, alongside trips and visits for students to engage in and trained Mental Health First Aiders. Thanks were given to Lucy McLeod for taking the time to feedback the impact of the funding on supporting students.

KCC's Reconnect programme was still working with schools, and the second in a series of hackathons last month had seen nine school teams focusing on ways to improve health, wellbeing and the ability to engage with learning within their school communities. Three overall winners were The School of Science and Technology (Maidstone), St Peter's CEP School (Folkestone), and Lady Joanna Thornhill PS (Ashford). Congratulations were given to them and to all those who took part.

Behind the scenes, officers were continuing to drive improvement in a variety of ways. The Transport Eligibility team in Fair Access had streamlined the way parents secured free school transport for their children. Secondary transfer mainstream families were contacted to advise them of their child's eligibility status, reducing the administrative burden of processing two and a half thousand applications. This allowed the team to focus on the assessment of SEN pupils' applications which could not be fully automated to allow consideration of each child's individual circumstances.

This placed KCC in the best possible position to meet the challenges of finalising school transport against a backdrop of a pressured transport sector and record high fuel prices.

Some bus services which served schools were being withdrawn from September. This was due to a combination of bus operator service withdrawals and the reduction in bus subsidies that KCC provided to keep certain services operating. The challenges that had led to these service withdrawals included lower passenger numbers combined with expensive fuel costs, driver shortages and rising inflation affecting the cost of maintaining vehicles. Colleagues in Public Transport were in direct communication with schools who were affected by service withdrawals, and a raft of communications were being distributed to Kent families and on KCC's website.

KCC was to continue to provide travel options to pupils who were eligible for free school transport, fulfilling the statutory duty. A child's entitlement to free school transport was not dependent on the mode of travel they had used, which unfortunately means that pupils would not become entitled to free school transport as a result of these changes. A dedicated resource was available on Kent.gov.uk to advise parents on what they could do if they found themselves affected by these changes. KCC was to provide refunds to any parents who had bought a Kent Travel Saver bus pass which they could not use because services had been withdrawn or were to be later in the year. Close work was being undertaken with other bus operators to see if they were able to offer any services to those being withdrawn but it was recognised that all operators were facing the same set of challenges.

It was understood how difficult the changes were for families across Kent and every effort was being undertaken to reduce their impact, however, KCC alone was not able to balance the impact currently being felt nationally across the transport sector.

Last week two burst water mains on the Isle of Sheppey resulted in residents and schools being left without water for two days. Schools and settings had to close as they could not operate safely.

A Red Alert weather warning was issued for the first time for the week beginning 18 July. Officers disseminated Department for Education (DfE) advice and guidance to schools which was to stay open if possible and to take sensible precautions and a very small number of schools closed, if, for example, their air conditioning broke down. Thanks were given to school colleagues in continuing to work through this and to ensure schools remained open for children and young people.

At the beginning of May, Internal Audit reviewed Children's, Young People and Education (CYPE) directorate's Business Continuity Plans. CYPE's engagement was managed through the directorate's Resilience Forum and the directorate received the highest possible Audit rating of "high assurance", with prospects for further improvements being deemed "very good".

On 4 July, a webinar covering Emergency Planning, Business Continuity Planning and Prevent was held for all schools to highlight the Council's roles and responsibilities in planning for and responding to incidents and emergencies and to highlight the services on offer to support schools. More than 200 school colleagues participated and gave very positive feedback and there had been increased contact

from schools seeking advice and support. The webinar recording was still available on KELSI for those who did not attend the live event.

Thanks were given to all the education leaders and staff across the county that had worked with children, young people and adults through a very challenging year.

3) Mr Brazier said that work was ongoing on a Kent Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to map and coordinate facilities across Kent. LCWIPs were being put into place on a district basis with some meeting their potential and others not meeting their full potential. There was work ongoing to encourage small schemes and to plan more strategic routes.

Correspondence had been received from residents regarding the use of chemicals on the hard surfaces of Kent's highways and concerns had been raised that these chemicals were detrimental to biodiversity and it was suggested weeds should be removed manually. The principal chemical used was glyphosate which was effective, legal and economical. However, KCC was experimenting with other solutions such as hot foam which was giving good results.

There was to be a meeting with Eurostar in next few days. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Eurostar trains had not been stopping at Ebbsfleet and Ashford International and the only terminal from the UK was St Pancras International. There was reason to believe this would start in 2022 but there was still no firm date for resumption of the services. This was very disappointing.

A time limited motion at the last meeting of County Council called for a policy to promote urban road clearance for short periods of time to enable children to play safely in the street. Mr Brazier was arranging to take the matter forward with officers on the basis that it would not require expenditure and responsibility and administration would be with the proposers of any event.

4) Miss Carey said that Household Waste Recycling Centres had been affected by the heatwave but had remained open. Staff had been able to take extra breaks and there had been monitoring of issues such as handrails which had been too hot to touch, melting tarmac and combustion and waste materials. Thanks were given to staff during this challenging period.

The publication of the Climate Change Committee's report had received a lot of attention in the media and one of the documents that was published at the same time, was the Climate Conversation, which recorded their experience of visiting local government areas and quoted the Leader twice. It also made reference to Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and it was great to see the work of KCC profiled in this way.

5) Mr Murphy said that he had attended a meeting of the Straits Committee which was focussed on environment, transport and planning issues with a particular focus on the ports.

The introduction of Entry/Exit System (EES) which was an automated IT system for entrance and exit for ports, had been put back further by the EU and it was expected to be implemented in May 2023. However, it was envisaged that this would be pushed back later to December 2023.

On 8 July, Mr Murphy presented to interested parties at the Future of Farming at the Kent County Show. Topics covered included: broadband roll out, training and skills, spread of disease and the social pressures that were on farmers and rural communities.

A KCC Rural Partnership Board was being established with an independent chairman, recognising the importance of the rural sector on Kent's: economy, skills, food production and related issues.

Good progress was being made with issues relating to power and energy with UK Power Networks. The distribution of power within Kent was extremely important, especially to attract modern industries.

KCC had supported Dover District Council's Levelling Up bid, the 'Dover Beacon' project regenerating the centre of Dover with new education facilities and more facilities for shoppers and residents.

The KCC Levelling Up bid for customs exit facilities to be built at Dover docks to speed up the clearance of vehicles had the support of Dover Harbour Board.

Panattoni were to create 250 jobs redeveloping the Marley Tiles site near Wrotham for delivery company, DPD. Barclays Eagle Labs were opening a facility at Discovery Park in Sandwich.

6) Mr Hill said the Emergency Planning function had been in action in the previous few weeks. The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) had stood up its full command structures in response to an incident on the Isle of Sheppey and the Level 4 Heatwave.

The KRF partners had supported residents on the Isle of Sheppey as a major incident was declared due to an issue with the water supply on 13 July. All KCC schools and buildings in the affected area were closed. The water supply was restored on 15 July.

In recent weeks, there had been a Level 4 Heatwave, power disruption, disruption to water supplies, challenges to public services and wildfires in the county. Communities had pulled together to support the vulnerable and thanks were given to all partners of the KRF and residents in Kent.

Demand for Community Wardens had steadily increased and their role has been crucial in supporting families, with mental health issues, anti-social behaviour, safeguarding and welfare concerns. The service was under pressure and recruitment was underway.

The Kent Libraries Summer Reading Challenge was running from 9 July to 10 September and aimed to keep children reading over the summer. This year's challenge had a special science and technology theme, inspiring imagination and creativity.

On 8 July, Mr Hill attended a presentation in Gravesend for the Queen's Baton Relay, which celebrated communities across the Commonwealth in the build up to the Commonwealth Games.

7) Mr Sweetland said that it had been a busy time for teams in his portfolio, working with partners from the KRF, sending out advice via social media. There was a heatwave campaign section on the website. At the same time, information also went out regarding the Southern Water issues with water supply for residents of the Isle of Sheppey.

The guidance on Covid-19 which remained an issue for the county and the country, was being regularly updated.

The Budget Consultation 2023/24 was launched on 19 July and Mr Oakford spoke about this on BBC Radio Kent on 21 July 2022.

8) Mr Oakford said the Budget Consultation 2023-24 had started earlier in 2022 compared to previous years. Like other years, there were huge challenges. However, the challenges were different due to the savings already planned in the Budget and due to the inflationary pressure. The government were not going to increase the grant to local government so there would be increased reliance on the tax base increase from residents of Kent. Residents were being asked where savings should be made in order to safeguard services which residents felt were important. Staff were encouraged to participate in the Budget Consultation which was available on the KCC website.

9) Mr Gough said he and Mr Brazier had been devoting time to the huge amount of concern across the county in relation to bus services and the impact on journeys to school. Mr Gough gave an interview to BBC Radio Kent and said it was important that KCC sought to keep parents and schools informed. An extra page had been set up on KCC's website: www.kent.gov.uk/buses

4. Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education

(Item 5)

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

1) Ms McInnes outlined the presentation (slides attached).

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

- It was felt that KCC's ambitions for children with SEND could be fulfilled within mainstream schools in many cases and work was ongoing to support schools.
- The approach to inclusive education was in line with KCC's response to the SEND Green Paper Consultation and the Written Statement of Action.

5. KCC's response to the SEND Green Paper Consultation

(Item 6)

Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director for CYPE and Mark Walker, Director for SEND was in attendance for this item.

1) Mrs Chandler introduced the report.

2) Ms Hammond outlined the report.

3) Further to comments, it was noted:

- Partnership arrangements were crucial and if the arrangements worked well, opportunities would be a lot greater for children across the county. This was emphasised within KCC's response to the SEND Green Paper Consultation.
- The ways of working and building partnerships were important and it had been suggested in KCC's response that schools be supported with any inspection regimes going forward, helping schools to focus more on SEND within the school environment.

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

6. Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

(Item 7)

Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director for CYPE was in attendance for this item.

1) The Leader and Mrs Chandler introduced the report.

2) Ms Hammond outlined the report and presentation regarding the Independent Review of Children's Social Care undertaken by Josh MacAlister (slides attached).

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

- A 'step-up, step-down' system had been used. 'Stepped-up' were cases that needed to legally be held by a Social Worker and 'stepped-down' were cases assigned to an Early Help Worker. It had been proposed in Josh MacAlister's review that this be disposed of and that there be blended teams with both Social Workers and Early Help.
- A more integrated, partnership approach with Regional Care Cooperatives was welcomed and it was felt that it would be beneficial for KCC to have the freedom to pair up with London boroughs, particularly in south London and not just other authorities in the south east. Much of the challenge in terms of the market was coming from the London boroughs.
- It was reported there had been insufficient data sharing between agencies when legislation allowed for more data to be shared. Information sharing was working well in Kent but nationally, it had been working less well. It was queried whether it was proposed to resurrect the 'Contact Point' database in order to improve data sharing. The information on the database would help to inform professionals safeguarding children. It was suggested that a solution would require a child to be added to a database at birth, with 'thin' information

held on the majority of children but those with disabilities, health concerns or vulnerabilities would have most information collected.

4) RESOLVED to note the report.

7. 16-19 Review

(Item 8)

Christine McInnes, Director for Education was in attendance for this item.

1) Mrs Prendergast introduced the report.

2) Ms McInnes outlined the presentation (slides attached).

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

- Some changes were to be in place by September 2023. There were 2 pilot schemes (in the Gravesham and Dover areas) of joint planning between post-16 education providers to try to get more of a spread within local areas.

4) RESOLVED to note the report.

8. Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme - Delivery Beyond August 2022

(Item 9)

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

1) Mrs Chandler introduced the report.

2) Mr Adams outlined the report.

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

- It was felt there were pressures over the summer on communities and in particular, young people due to the 'cost of living' crisis. The continuation of this work was important in making a difference over the coming weeks as well as going into the autumn. It was important that messages were shared widely about the programme so that people were aware of what was available.
- The countywide Youth Forum mentioned in the report at point 5.4 referred to a forum for providers of services to young people, rather than a forum for young people themselves.

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

9. Homelessness Connect

(Item 10)

The Leader advised Members that this agenda item had been superseded by notice of two Forthcoming Executive Decisions and therefore, the item would not be discussed at the meeting.

