

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ on Tuesday, 6 September 2022.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Miss Carey, for whom Mr Hills attended for virtually, and Mrs Prendergast, for whom Ms Hamilton attended for.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 2)

Resolved that there were no declarations of interest.

3. Scrutiny Committee Request for Review of Decision 22/00052 (KCC Supported Bus Funding Review)

(Item 3)

Simon Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, and Phil Lightowler, Interim Director of Highways and Transportation were in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Watts (General Counsel) set out the Council's procedural position, summarising the background detailed within the report. Mr Watt's confirmed that the Call-in did not indicate that the decision was at variance to the budget nor at variance to policy; however, it was deemed valid under reasons related to further consideration of evidence. It was therefore confirmed that Cabinet could rescind, amend or confirm the decision and that if not rescinded, the decision would be subject to review by Full Council on 15th September. As clarified within the covering report, should the matter be referred to Full Council, it would have the authority to either agree implementation with no comments; express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision; or to require implementation to be postponed pending review of the matter by Cabinet. Full Council would not be able to resolve to overturn the decision. This was because the Council operates an Executive model of governance which places authority, responsibility and accountability for Executive decision-making with the Leader and Cabinet.

- 2) No comments were received from Members regarding procedural matters and therefore general comments were invited by the Chair.
- 3) In response to queries regarding the BSIP funding and how this could be spent, Mr Gough noted the fluctuation in tone from the communications received from the DfT; however, the substance of those discussions had remained consistent in that the BSIP was not to be used to preserve the status-quo. It was also clear that revenue was not to be used to sustain existing structures or existing routes. It was also highlighted that acceptance and deployment of any BSIP funding made available to Kent would be subject to separate Executive decision-making and that prior to that decision-making, any reliance on BSIP funding to influence other decisions was problematic.
- 4) Mr Lightowler advised that whilst the DfT had recognised that recent communication had given the impression of change to the BSIP funding, the DfT had confirmed that it was not to be used for existing services or for those services being withdrawn. The BSIP could only be used for new initiatives and new services.
- 5) Comments were noted regarding the importance of drawing a clear distinction between the Executive decision taken in relation to KCC subsidised bus services and the unrelated commercial service withdrawals being determined by the commercial bus operators.
- 6) Mr Brazier (*Cabinet Member for Highways and transport*) advised that the County Council agreed at its meeting in February 2022 that the supported bus portfolio of 137 services costing £6m should yield a saving of £2.2m in order to achieve a balanced budget for the year 2022-2023. There were 48 services identified for withdrawal from October 2022, with a Net cost of £3m. Following a public consultation carried out from 4th February to 20 April 2022, a modified proposal was then developed and presented to the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 6th July 2022 where Members endorsed the decision to reduce the portfolio of supported buses by 37 services and so deliver a budget saving of £2.2m. It was recognised that the withdrawal of support of 37 buses would have serious consequences for many Kent residents, however, there was a need to make associated savings of £2.2m. Mr Brazier commented that the executive would rather not have to make such decisions, recognising the impact the changes would have on some service users, but emphasised that the decision was necessary from a financial and service sustainability perspective. Mr Brazier therefore recommended that the decision not be rescinded by Cabinet and be subject to further debate by the wider Council membership at Full Council on 15th September.
- 7) Mr Oakford (*Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services*) raised concerns around the ongoing budgetary pressures amid a huge growth in demand of services and yet further reductions from central government. The Council made the decision to not

increase council tax above the referendum limit and instead agreed to find savings within its own budget. It was highlighted that the impact of not making the proposed savings would have a detrimental impact on the Council's ability to balance the budget.

- 8) Following the Cabinet debate and having taken into consideration the comments made at Scrutiny Committee on 18th August 2022, it was **RESOLVED** to confirm the decision without amendment and refer the matter to Full Council on 15th September for review.