

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, Maidstone, ME14 1XQ on Thursday, 29 September 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 P J Oakford, Mrs S Prendergast and Mr J A Kite, MBE

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Murphy and Mr Sweetland, for whom Mr Kite was in attendance.

2. Declarations of interest

(Item 2)

RESOLVED that there were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 July 2022

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 September 2022

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

5. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 5)

1. Mrs Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) provided an update on the Kent Drug & Alcohol Strategy 2023- 2028 Consultation which was launched on 6th September. The Consultation sought the views and experiences of Kent residents regarding local drug and alcohol services in order to help shape a new five-year strategy. This was overseen by the Kent Substance Misuse Alliance - a partnership of key organisations including councils, Kent Police, emergency services and health providers. The consultation focused on the 30 strategic priorities which were grouped under 3 areas: prevention, treatment and recovery, and community safety. All the priorities in the Kent strategy were taken

from local needs and were also aligned to the National Drug Strategy: “From Harm to Hope”. Figures for 2021 estimated that nearly 308,000 people in Kent were drinking above the recommended levels of alcohol and an estimated 15% were binge drinkers, with around 10% of adults reporting drug use within the past year. The consultation was due to close on 31 October 2022. Further information was available via: www.kent.gov.uk/drugandalcoholstrategy

World Suicide Prevention Day took place on 10th September 2022. A Maidstone-based mental health charity, which was part funded by Kent County Council, urged people to access free suicide prevention and awareness training. Information regarding the training was available on their website: www.maidstonemind.org and sessions lasted about 3.5 hours. People were also reminded of the help available in Kent including an easy-to-use mental health text service and helpline ‘Release The Pressure’ which was free to call on 0800 107 0160 or people could text the word ‘Kent’ to 85258. Further information was available via: www.releasethepressure.uk

Kent County Council’s Counter Fraud team joined Swale Borough Council’s Parking team as they visited several streets and car parks on Thursday 4 August to check that Blue badges were being used by the authorised person and in the correct way. Blue badge holders who were spoken to throughout the day welcomed the news and gave positive feedback about the need for badges to be inspected in the Borough. In total 209 people had badges inspected and most people spoken to were using the badge in accordance with the scheme. The civil enforcement officers ceased 13 badges that had expired. Changes in the eligibility criteria meant there had been an increase in the number of badges used in Kent. It was therefore paramount that available spaces were used for legitimate purposes. Abuse of the scheme would not be tolerated, and members of the public could report the misuse of a blue badge online via: www.kent.gov.uk/reportfraud

To conclude, the council’s commissioned digital care programme project ‘Kara’ won another award at the Health Tech Digital Awards (1 August) coming first in the “Best COVID-19 Solution for Safeguarding the Vulnerable” category. Mrs Bell reminded Members that in March 2020, Kent County Council commissioned healthcare transformation consultancy Rethink Partners and pioneers of virtual care Alcove to launch a programme to deliver up to 2,000 Video Carephone devices to vulnerable people in the county as part of a swift and innovative social care response to the COVID-19 outbreak, enabling vulnerable adults to talk to friends, family, carers and professionals when they were unable to meet due to COVID-19 restrictions. This project had been nationally recognised again and was a testament to the huge positive difference that digital solutions could make to Kent’s vulnerable residents.

2. Mrs Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) reported that Ofsted were in the process of carrying out a revisit of Kent's SEND services from 26th to 30th September, looking at how the county had progressed since the inspection in 2019. An update on the outcomes of this visit would be provided in due course.

With regard to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) on 24th August 2022, the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration announced that the percentage threshold under this scheme would rise from 0.07% to 0.1%. This change took Kent County Council's quota from 242 to 346 children in care. KCC continued to operate over capacity at the 0.07% level, however, preparations were being made to accept the additional children into the Council's care service. The Safe Care and Reception Service from which children and young people were allocated to other Local authorities through the National Transfer Scheme was still in operation. A request to government had been made to ensure that allocations were spread more evenly. It was noted that Ukrainian children placed into local authority care would not be included in the UASC threshold.

Alongside this change, the government also announced that the deadline for transfers of UASC not currently in local authority care had been reduced from ten to five working days. For transfers between local authorities, this would remain at ten working days. This had been designed to reduce the need for using hotels; however, due to increasing numbers, a new hotel specifically for receiving minors had been opened in Coventry.

It was noted that as of 23rd September, there had been 1035 UASC referrals in 2022, which was already more than the previous record set in 2015. The largest proportion of arrivals was currently from Albania (around 80%). Furthermore, due to KCC's retention of safeguarding responsibilities whilst waiting for UASC to be relocated by the Home Office from hotels, this also created additional workload.

Mrs Chandler went on to report that phase 2 of the Newly Qualified Social Worker recruitment campaign had gone live from 1st September and was hopeful that this would bolster Kent's pool of talented social workers. Furthermore, KCC staff interested in undertaking a Social Work degree apprenticeship, were encouraged to attend a webinar. Details of this were available on KNet.

To conclude, Mrs Chandler expressed her thanks to the Chairs of the 12 Local Children's Partnership Groups for their hard work and input.

3. Mrs Prendergast (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) offered her congratulations to all pupils who received their GCSE, BTEC, A Level and T Level results. Detailed statistics of the results would be available in November and would be reported at a future meeting. Mrs Prendergast also paid tribute to primary school staff and pupils for their work to prepare for the SATs this summer.

With regard to the Kent Test, 8,298 pupils sat the test on Thursday 8th September and Saturday 10th September. The results were due to be shared with families on 18th October. The outcomes would be reported at a future meeting.

To conclude, Mrs Prendergast provided an update on the economic challenges and skills shortages in the county. Approximately 7,000 people across Kent participated in Adult Education funded courses run by KCC's Community Learning Service and the 3 Further Education Colleges, East Kent College Group, Mid Kent and North Kent Colleges (all rated Good by Ofsted). Assistance in helping people to gain new skills was also available through programmes delivered via the Department for Work and Pensions or independent providers. However, despite areas of excellent work, gaps in provision or duplication continued to result in missed opportunities to help people progress into employment. Assurance was provided that work was being done to improve collaboration between all parties, to ensure the courses met employer demand (as set out in the business-led Local Skills Improvement Plan and KCC's own Workforce Skills Evidence Base), and that resources were shared. Progress on this work would be reported at a future meeting.

4. Mr Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) reported on his recent visit to Dover on 9th August to participate in the formal opening of the £3.6m Dover Public Rail Improvement project within the market square. The development was partly financed through the government's Coastal Communities fund, with contributions from Kent County Council and was constructed by FM Conway Limited with works supported by the Kent Highways Project Management Team.

Brompton Bikes, an ambitious, innovative company that specialised in folding bicycles recently revealed plans to open a revolutionary and sustainable factory in Ashford by 2032, with the aim of producing 200,000 bicycles a year and expanding its campaign for active travel in Kent. This was a concept that Kent County Council were eager to explore further, and meetings would be held in the near future.

Mr Brazier addressed the withdrawal of the 80 commercial bus services across Kent and advised that this was separate to the withdrawal of the 37 subsidised buses agreed at the budget County Council meeting in February 2022. The UK operated a deregulated bus industry whereby service profitability dictated service supply, which in turn created a huge degree of concern for Kent residents particularly for those who lived in rural areas. More recently, the principal independent operator in Sevenoaks lost their operator hub in Otford and had to relocate to Swanley, making services to and from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, which were heavily relied upon by secondary school pupils, increasingly difficult. Whilst KCC had no obligation to mitigate the consequences of this, the Public Transport Team worked tirelessly to identify operators who were prepared

to provide the service and ensure that sufficient travel facilities were in place for those children. Mr Brazier gave thanks to the team for their continued hard work.

To conclude, Mr Brazier also welcomed Haroona Chughtai, Director of Highways and Transportation to Kent County Council.

5. Miss Carey (Cabinet Member for Environment) announced that Kent County Council had been awarded £98,500 from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF), which would help to support the Council's Net Zero project.

It was further reported that recent data taken from the solar energy farm in Somerset revealed that for the 3 days in August whereby the park operated at full capacity (100%), it provided 55% of Kent County Council's energy requirement for that month. The project which was commissioned to run over a 40-year period would help to significantly reduce Kent County Council's carbon footprint and create considerable savings to electricity costs.

On 28th September, Miss Carey attended a tour of the Old Chalk New Downs projects which aimed to restore and reconnect remaining fragments of threatened chalk grassland habitats. The project, which had been funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund, was due to come to an end and a conference was due to be held on 4th October to both celebrate the project's success, but also review the lessons learned.

Members were also advised of the free-to-attend Southeast Retrofit Summit, which was due to be held from 18th to 20th October. These were online sessions and provided attendees with the opportunity to hear and network with the UK's low carbon leaders. Retrofitting which adopts a whole-house approach, helps to create warmer homes which in turn reduces carbon emissions. This was one of the many examples of projects which Kent County Council were involved in which helped both residents and the Council in achieving reduced carbon emissions.

Solar Together Kent, which was a solar panel and battery storage group-purchase scheme was in the mobilisation phase. The scheme had proved to be hugely popular this year amongst the increase in energy costs and there was scope for Kent County Council to do more work around this to help residents reduce energy cost and carbon emissions.

Miss Carey concluded by thanking staff who continued to work tirelessly on delivering the various projects across the Environment and Waste portfolio, and for their efforts in finding additional savings.

6. The Leader provided an update on behalf of Mr Murphy (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) on the No Use Empty Scheme and reported on the recent success of the scheme in Margate whereby a derelict

property had been redeveloped to a home standard. The scheme had also supported the rejuvenation of an empty commercial building in Dover Business Park which would be utilised by Tridax Limited, a Kent-based civil engineering firm.

Members were reminded of the site-visit to Mesaroli on 13th October; a logistics company based at Discovery Park in Sandwich which specialised in the transportation of food, clothes, livestock and pharmaceuticals.

The first Rural Partnership Board was due to meet on 5th October and would bring together key partners from across the rural sector in Kent.

With regard to nutrient neutrality, Dover District Council had been advised that their development plans did not have a significant impact on the quality of Stodmarsh nature reserve and therefore the planning applications which had been put on hold could now be determined. Government's plans released on 20th July provided further clarity around the funding from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which allowed planning authorities to take positive steps forward.

To conclude, Members were reminded of the ongoing endeavours of the Economic Development Working Group, in bringing together Kent County Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council, to put forward a detailed case to ministers as to the suitability of Dungeness for a modular reactor site.

7. Mr Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) announced that Kent Country Parks had retained all 8 of their Green Flag Awards which was a testament to the team's hard work and the quality of the parks. New and improved play areas were also being provided across most of KCC's country parks, through a £1.1million investment from Public Health Covid-19 recovery funding. The play area included several carefully considered inclusive elements for those with disabilities. Two additional Changing Places facilities had also been installed at Brockhill and Lullingstone Country Parks.

The summer reading challenge "Gadgeteers" ran between 9th July and 10th September. Participation reached pre-covid levels with 18,419 children taking part. Mr Hill provided feedback from families about how the Summer Reading Challenge helped them.

On 8th September 2022, Mr Hill attended the opening ceremony for the state-of-the-art dance centre for the internationally renowned Jasmin Vardimon Company, based in Ashford. The development was largely financed through an innovative approach by KCC, which utilised income from 26 commercial units on an adjoining site to provide investment for the new building. Further capital investment had been secured from Arts Council England, Ashford Borough Council (ABC) and the South-East

Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Kent Music was also due to move into one of the existing units next to Jasmin Vardimon. A formal opening event was due to take place in December.

To conclude, Mr Hill reported that the Kent County Council led Southeast consortium had been selected as one of the six regions to participate in the Create Growth Programme, an initiative under the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). The programme would provide a bespoke package of business and investor support to assist creative businesses to scale and access finance outside London.

8. Mr Kite (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communications and Engagement) reported that the Great Big Green Week, a UK wide celebration of community action to tackle climate change, was taking place from 24th September to 2nd October 2022. The KCC Communications Team had launched an interactive map to help spread the word of community events taking place and encourage widespread participation.

The Digital Champion campaign, which was established as part of the Helping Hands Scheme to tackle digital exclusion, had been put forward for a national award. Applicants would be notified of the outcome of their submission in December 2022.

The Communications Team continued to provide Kent residents with information on how to stay well protected through its Winter Campaign and assurance was provided that Kent County Council was well placed to deal with any outbreaks. This was closely tied into the cost-of-living crisis, and again, ensuring that the Communications Team continued to provide crucial information, support and assurance to Kent residents.

A number of innovative approaches continued to be adopted by the Kent Communications Team to ensure residents were fully sighted on the Winter Service plans impacting Kent's roads and highways.

National Inclusion Week ran from 26th to 30th September and provided directorates and staff with an opportunity to celebrate inclusion but also reinforce Kent County Council's commitments to inclusivity. Again, the Communications Team were instrumental in ensuring that our work and commitment was shared amongst staff.

To conclude, a review of staff satisfaction and support was being carried out, with feedback to date identifying pay and career progression as priorities on the agenda for change. This was an important area of focus and work was ongoing.

9. The Leader announced that Kent County Council had been approached by the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding government's proposal to introduce Investment Zones, a scheme that would support the acceleration of housing and infrastructure growth.

All Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) and Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLA) were invited to complete an Expression of Interest to submit to government to indicate their desire to be involved in preliminary discussions. The Leader assured Members that the submission of interest did not commit Kent County Council to any further actions. Close examination of the opportunities and challenges would be carried out and Kent County Council would look to work closely with District and Borough Councils, along with Kent MPs to help inform those discussions with government. The Leader thanked Simon Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport) and his team for their expeditious response to the request.

6. Quarterly Performance Report, Quarter 1, 2022/23
(Item 6)

Rachel Kennard, Chief Analyst was in attendance for this item.

1. Rachel Kennard outlined the report for Quarter 1 (Q1), 2022-2023 and highlighted that out of the 37 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) contained within the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), 21 achieved target (rated green), 8 achieved and exceeded the floor standard but did not meet target (rated amber), and 8 did not meet floor standard (rated red). Changes made to the Q1 report included an additional 6 KPIs and increased targets for 10 of the existing KPIs. With regard to the direction of travel, 5 indicators had shown a positive trend, 27 were stable with no clear trend and 5 had shown a negative trend. A summary was provided of the 8 indicators which had been RAG rated as red.
2. Mrs Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) addressed the negative trend against the proportion of new Care Needs Assessments delivered within 28 days and explained that this was largely due to a higher number of complex cases alongside additional requests for support. This was also detailed within the financial monitoring report (*item 7 of the agenda pack*) in relation to the significant forecast variance for older people in residential care services. Assurance was provided that both the performance and delivery of assessments was closely monitored and that appropriate steps had been put in place to address areas of improvement. A number of digital initiatives were also being explored to enhance access to self-service tools which in turn would help to reduce demand within the service and create capacity within the system which was financially sustainable.
3. Mr Kite (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communications and Engagement) said that whilst the qualitative nature of call handling remained high, difficulty in staff recruitment and retention within the Contact Point was a contributing factor as to why performance levels had fallen in respect of calls answered and complaints responded to within timescale. Work was being done within the service to identify opportunities for career progression to retain experienced staff.

4. Mrs Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services) commented on the percentage of Education, Health Care Plans (EHCPs) issued within 20 weeks and advised that this was indicative of the challenges across the county for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Assurance was provided to Members that improvement within this area remained a strong focus.
5. RESOLVED to note the report.

7. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report (June 2022-23)
(Item 7)

John Betts, Interim Corporate Director of Finance, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) introduced the report which set out the overall forecast position as at the end of June for 2022-23. Revenue overspend was +£50.6m and a capital underspend was -£11.2m. Such an overspend was of serious concern for the Council and created a large degree of financial uncertainty which would require immediate action, especially due to the ongoing impact of inflationary pressures which were continuing to increase through quarter 2. In particular, the forecast for Adult Social Care and Children, Young People and Education showed significant overspends of £25.6m and £24.5m respectively. Any overspend at the end of the financial year would need to be met from general or earmarked reserves; however, this approach would not be sustainable in the medium term. Unless mitigated, the current level of overspend would require close to 50% of the Council's total reserves at the end of the 2022-2023 financial year.
2. The capital forecast which showed an underspend of -£11.2m consisted of +£21.0m real overspend and -£32.2m rephasing variance.
3. The projected deficit on the High Needs budget had increased by £47m for the year 2022-2023, from £101m at the end of the 2021-22 and was estimated to increase to around £148m by the end of the 2022-2023 financial year. The High Needs deficit was the Council's single most significant financial risk.
4. RESOLVED to note and agree the recommendations in the report.

8. KCC's Response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis
(Item 8)

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Whittle introduced the report which set out Kent County Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis. The paper highlighted that whilst the primary responsibility for easing the crisis at the population level sat with Government, through existing schemes and grant programmes following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council already had in place several support programmes that were helping vulnerable residents in Kent with financial hardship and cost-of-living issues. The report also set out a range of next steps, particularly regarding an enhanced response working alongside strategic partners. Issues of the inflationary pressures on KCC services or budgets directly, or those of our providers, would be considered through the budget development process.
2. Members were advised that the report was based on the paper intended for County Council on 15 September, which was postponed due to the death of the Queen. An addendum paper had since been produced, summarising key announcements in the interim, including energy support schemes for residents, businesses and non-domestic users. This information was detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
3. Further to comments and questions, it was noted:
 - A third round of Household Support Fund was expected to be provided by the Government. This was awaiting final approval from the Treasury.
 - That a multifaceted, coordinated approach with partners at a local level was essential in ensuring that frontline teams had greater visibility of those experiencing financial and/or social difficulty so that they could be easily identified and provided with the right help, at the right time, through the correct organisation.
 - KCC had launched a secure referral system called ReferKent across the county for organisations to refer individuals for financial advice and wider holistic support. The system would also provide the ability to track referrals.
 - The scope of the Financial Hardship programme (initially established to support people struggling with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic) was being expanded to support new workstreams which were required to help tackle the cost-of-living crisis.
 - The Integrated Care Partnership was identified as the vehicle through which Kent and Medway partners could work together to jointly address the medium to longer term impact of the cost-of-living crisis. A paper was due to be presented to the Integrated Care Partnership on 19th October 2022 on the cost of living which would identify ways in which resources could be utilised.
4. Miss Carey (Cabinet Member for Environment) advised that a number of environmental initiatives were being explored to help improve energy saving costs, including working with utility companies and identifying ways to reduce

food wastage. The Environment team were also producing a bid to the public sector Decarbonisation Scheme. This grant would be used to help towards the cost of replacing domestic heating systems which were not included as part of the governments energy price cap scheme. If successful, the replacement programme would include Kent Primary schools.

5. RESOLVED to note and endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report, and that a further report be presented to County Council on 20th October.