

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 5 January 2023.

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 R C Love, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford and Mrs S Prendergast

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair, subject to it being noted that Mr Love was present at the meeting.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement had included an additional £2.8 billion for Adult Social Care. The Social Care Support Grant made up the most significant amount which had provided £32 million to the Council and a further £7 million was to be made available through the ringfenced Adult Social Care Discharge Fund. The Adult Social Care Levy was to potentially increase by 2% which would mean an extra £16.8 million for the Council. The additional funding was welcomed; however, it would not resolve the challenges being faced. The reform of Adult Social Care charging had been postponed for two years, allowing for a refocus on the service redesign entitled 'Making a Difference Everyday'. The Kara project had been included in a case study in the County Spotlight publication as an example of best practice and innovation.

Mrs Bell gave a list of services that were available that promoted health and wellbeing. Advice had been given to parents and teachers regarding symptoms of scarlet fever, that could lead to Strep A, which although rare had seen a rise over recent months. There had been a rise in Covid-19 cases, which were expected to continue. Precautions had been put in place due to the pressures currently on the health service. No trigger points on Covid-19 data had yet been reached but people were recommended to follow Public Health England guidance.

2) Mrs Chandler said as there had been 57 UASC referrals since the start of December. This was the lowest total of any month so far this year, but still the highest total for the month of December with the exception of 2021. The total for 2022 stood at 1,373. By the next meeting of Cabinet, Mrs Chandler was to provide a total for the full year.

Retaining qualified social workers was a challenge that KCC and many other local authorities faced. Social work was an extremely rewarding career but there were a range of internal and external pressures which affected retention. Government figures had shown that there had been a 16% increase in those leaving the profession in the past year, the highest number in the last five years.

To help better understand the landscape faced in social work, Kent County Council had agreed to be part of a research project run by The University of Kent. This would reflect on the experiences of those who qualified as social workers in the last three to five years (qualifying in 2017 to 2019). The goal was to understand what kept them working at the local authority and what might be a reason for them to leave. Social work staff across Kent who had joined the authority between 2017 and 2019 had been invited to take part in a short 30-minute interview on an anonymous basis as part of the study. Initial findings were expected in March 2023 and would be used to look at what measures could be put in place to ensure continuous improvement.

Thanks were given to all the individuals and organisations across Kent who donated to the Corporate Parenting Christmas Appeal. The Appeal raised just over £30,000, well above the target of £20,000 in order to provide every care leaver in Kent with a £10 gift voucher.

3) Mr Love said out of 17,254 Kent pupils completing GCSEs in 2022, the average attainment 8 score (the government metric which factors in English, Maths and English Baccalaureate subjects) was 49.2. This put Kent slightly ahead of the national average of 48.8, and ahead of neighbouring counties such as East Sussex and Essex.

There was still a notable gender divide when it came to achieving a pass in English, with 73.3% of Kent's boys achieving a strong or standard pass, compared to 83.1% of Kent's girls. However, pass rates for Maths are just 1% apart. In both cases, this was in line with national trends.

Of 7,089 Kent students who received their A Level results in 2022, 86.2% achieved 2 or more passes. This was slightly below the national average of 88%. However, Kent was in line with the national average when it came to achieving 3 or more A* and A grades, with both coming in at 21.3%. As per GCSEs, girls were again outperforming boys, although the differences are less pronounced. Again, Kent is mirroring the national picture here.

376 Kent students completed T Level qualifications in 2022, with average results being within half a percentage point of the national average. This was the first cohort of students to complete the two-year long courses which were introduced in September 2020, and included a mixture of practical, knowledge and on-the-job based learning via an industry placement.

It was announced at the end of November that, following the conclusion of a six-month review, colleges in England were to be reclassified as public sector bodies, marking a significant change which was to include new controls on borrowing, finance and governance. This affected further education colleges, sixth form college corporations and designated institutions in England and ends a decade of private sector status.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission had announced that there would be a new SEND inspection framework. This came into force in January 2023 and was to see future inspections of Services rated with three new inspection “outcomes”. The first addressed whether SEND services were “taking action where improvements are needed”. The second focus was on whether services led to “inconsistent experiences and outcomes”. The third was to highlight “widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns”.

4) Mr Brazier said that there had not been a decision on the £35 million Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) application from the Department for Transport. If this amount were to be granted, a Members’ working group was to be established to ensure that the funding was used effectively.

Mr Brazier had been briefed on Kent’s Major Road Network bid for the Birchington, Acol and Westgate-on-Sea relief road which would provide improved connectivity between the A299 – Thanet Way and the Margate area. The scheme which was valued at £60 million consisted of 8 kilometres of new highways infrastructure together with improved cycling and walking connectivity. This was the subject of an active bid to the Department for Transport. £750,000 had been granted to produce an outline business case.

There had been a “Dragon’s Den” style, competitive event, ADEPT Live Labs 2: Decarbonising Local Roads in the UK. The submission from Brighton & Hove City Council and KCC, was concerned with the increase in the rate of the deterioration of the highways in view of the increased weight of electric freight and passenger vehicles. This was an experimental programme and the proposal was that having established the impact, work was undertaken to refine and make practicable ways of increasing the resilience of the highways. The judges responded favourably to the submission and the outcome of the competition was to be announced.

The brief period of very cold weather in December followed a longer period of persistent rain in November and December. KCC’s 64 gritters had been fully engaged during the cold period and there were positive comments made about the efficiency and thoroughness of their work. Potholes had appeared on many routes and repairs would be undertaken when the weather permitted.

The Active Travel unit had been awarded £565,000 from the Active Travel England Capability Fund, which would allow the Council and partners to work with residents to create routes that encourage walking and cycling.

5) Miss Carey said there had been two conferences, the Kent Environment Conference, held in Canterbury and the Plan Bee Conference, which was an online event. Thanks were given to staff and participants for making these a success.

Funding had been granted from The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund for nearly £300,000 in order that officers be recruited to ensure the planting of trees in the right places. There had also been a successful bid to the Local Authority Treescape Fund for a capital grant.

There were a series of pilot schemes being undertaken at KCC's Household Waste and Recycling Centres to divert waste – in order to reduce the amount of waste being incinerated when it could be reused or recycled.

6) Mr Murphy said a joint letter been sent to the Secretary of State making the case for the Dungeness Power Station site to be included in the list of sites for small/medium reactors and to call for the government's urgent development of the national policy statement, allowing this to happen.

Mesaroli, who specialised in refrigerated/chilled transport, had recently moved to Discovery Park and had indicated that they had expansion plans involving using Kent as a distribution site for the rest of the UK. Grow Up Farms were moving into production of salads in their new facility and were looking for a provider of chilled transport.

The Kent Rural Partnership had been set up to demonstrate KCC's support for rural sector and communities. It had been well attended and the initial focus had been agreed- education, research and development.

The Broadband team had started a joint project with Dover District Council into the provision of broadband for multi-occupancy buildings.

Mr Murphy gave an update on the No-Use-Empty scheme in Dover. Tridax had been supported by the scheme with a loan of £1 million, was now in production as well as a printing firm and a glazing firm. A customs import firm from Belgium was to be welcomed and a further 22 business units were also under construction.

7) Mr Mike Hill said that a new Arts Hub for the county had been opened in Ashford as part of the regeneration of the Henwood industrial estate. It was housing a dance company and the aspiration was that creative organisations would move into the Hub, encouraging connection and collaboration. Kent Music had already bought units to join the Hub.

There had been an announcement of the Arts Council's national portfolio with 10 Kent organisations being supported, including Kent Libraries.

It had been announced that the Chairman of the Turner Contemporary was Matthew Slotover, succeeding Clive Stevens on 1 January. Matthew Slotover was cofounder of *Frieze* magazine, which he helped establish, and of the first Frieze art fair.

8) Mrs Prendergast wished a happy New Year to everyone and particularly to staff who amid all the pressures and crises in recent times, and in the vital day to day delivery of services, had been there to support residents and communities with dedication and commitment.

The normal winter pressures were being exacerbated by both Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. The latest residents e-newsletter had been published just before

Christmas. The Winter Campaign from the Communications team was centred around KCC continuing to provide consistent information and help to those who need it.

There was lots of advice and support on KCC's website for residents, to help with money and benefits issues, household bills, finding work, health and wellbeing, as well as support for families, young people, the elderly, and vulnerable people.

The Kent Together campaign, borne out of the community spirit of the pandemic was still going strong and close working with partners and the voluntary sector to help support those who needed it most.

9) Mr Oakford said the draft budget had been published and the huge amount of work to achieve a balanced budget was recognised. A balanced budget had been very hard to achieve in such difficult times, and those involved, including the Finance team, were thanked for their efforts. Work was to be done to reduce the deficit as far as possible during the final 3 months of the financial year. Money would be drawn from the reserves to ensure that the budget was balanced this financial year. Staff and Members were to be briefed on the Community Assets Plan, which would contribute to financial savings and carbon reduction.

10) Mr Gough endorsed what had been said about work across all parts of the Council on the budget.

4. Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement

(Item 5)

Mr Dave Shipton, Head of Finance (Policy, Strategy and Planning), and Benjamin Watts, General Counsel, were in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report. He said that the financial settlement was much more than expected but major challenges remained, especially in Adult Social Care.

2) Mr Shipton outlined the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. The settlement represented the largest increase in funding in over a decade but in real terms still fell short of spending growth projections, which would leave a significant gap. The process by which the freezing of business rates would be compensated for was explained. Additional funding of £2.8 billion had been announced in the Autumn Statement for Adult Social Care 2023-2024. This was to be delivered to the Council through three different grant mechanisms totalling £51.6 million for KCC including the existing grant, support for discharges and increasing capacity within the sector and the Adult Social Care Council Tax precept. The new homes bonus grant had been extended for 1 further year, with £2.3 million for KCC in 2023-24. The overall settlement was an increase of government grants to £63.9 million, and the rise in council tax referendum thresholds would allow a further £51.2 million to be raised. It was noted that this was very significant with the increase totalling £115.2 million.

3) The Leader said that he was grateful for the better-than-expected provisional settlement and the degree of priority given to Local Government and Adult Social Care.

4) Mr Watts said there had been no reduction to the statutory duties placed upon the Council.

5) RESOLVED to note the report.

5. Quarterly Performance Report (Quarter 2 2022/23) (Item 6)

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

1) Ms Kennard outlined the report for Quarter 2 (Q2), 2022-2023 and highlighted that out of the 37 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) contained within the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), 17 achieved target (rated green), 13 achieved and exceeded the floor standard but did not meet target (rated amber), and 7 did not meet floor standard (rated red). A summary was provided of the 7 indicators which had been RAG rated as red.

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

- Attempts to recruit foster carers were ongoing and that despite an increase in referrals, the proportion of children in care remained below the national average. The cost-of-living crisis had potentially negatively affected the recruitment of foster carers.
- The issue regarding the target timescale for issuing EHCPs was not unique to Kent and the OFSTED annual report had shown that 40% of local authorities were missing the target. Work was ongoing to improve performance, but the volume of work had increased.
- It was acknowledged that there was a link between budget pressures and what was being reported through the Quarterly Performance Report indicators.

3) RESOLVED to note the report.

6. Corporate Risk Register (Item 7)

Mark Scrivener, Corporate Risk and Assurance Manager, was in attendance for this item.

1) Mark Scrivener introduced the report.

2) Further to comments and questions it was noted:

- Some risks were beyond the Council's ability to control, but all attempts to mitigate risks would be taken. Budget monitoring and the Strategic Reset Programme would be central to understanding and responding to these risks. Similar risks and mitigations were found in other comparable Councils, but there were some unique risks for Kent due to its geographical location.

- There had been effective ongoing work between KCC and central government to make the risk related to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) more manageable. The risk remained considerable due to the volume of arrivals.

3) RESOLVED to note the report.