

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 26 January 2023.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), 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)*

Apologies were received from Mrs Bell.

##### **2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 January 2023**

*(Item 3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 5 January 2023 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

##### **3. Cabinet Member Updates**

*(Item 4)*

1) Mrs Chandler confirmed the final total figures for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) referrals in 2022 as 1,378, which was significantly higher than in previous years. The staff who had been responsible for the referrals were thanked for their efforts during a challenging year. As of 20 January 2023, there had been 45 UASC referrals since the start of the year. There were also 48 open cases of under-18s who had not claimed asylum on arrival.

An update was provided on the 0-5 strategy task and finish group chaired by Mrs S Hamilton, two meetings had been held, with six additional meetings planned. Four would be focussed on operational matters and the final two to discuss the next steps. Feedback had been positive, and Mrs Chandler was confident that a range of positive outcomes would be produced in the future.

2) Mr Love said that the Department for Education had announced that 8 Kent schools had been successful in their bids under the School Rebuilding Programme. The schools were a mix of both primary and secondary and the funding would ensure that they were fit for the future and open the opportunity for expansion.

Mr Love visited Simon Langton Girls Grammar School, 10 January 2023, to see the Biojoyversity programme and learn about the new initiative, Encompass. Mr Love thanked students and staff for all their work, energy and passion displayed during the visit.

Mr Love said that he had visited the recently opened Barton Manor School in Canterbury. Mr Love remarked on the school's ethos and design and said that new capital investment had been made due to its links as an academy trust. Mr Love had also met with two members of Kent PACT where important issues were discussed and their ongoing contributions to the SEND assurance board. The first meeting of the SEND Assurance Board had occurred on 18 January 2023 and Deborah Glassbrook had been appointed as the Independent Chair and would bring much experience that would be of benefit to the Kent area. Mr Love said that the first meeting had been productive and would be an important step to improve the experience of all those who used SEND services.

3) Miss Carey said that the Environment Team had won a further set of grants from the Public Sector De-carbonisation scheme, pending sign-off from the Corporate Director for Finance. The funding was to be used on projects which would contribute to carbon savings and result in reduced energy costs. This was to be achieved through a new building management system upgrade and switching from gas to electric heat pump at Worrall House. The Yew Tree Centre was also to get a building management system upgrade, double-glazed windows, LED lighting and a switch from a gas boiler to an electric heat pump. The Ashford Gateway Plus would get LED lights and switch from a gas boiler to an electric heat pump. Also, the KCC building at Oxford Road would get a new building management system, double-glazed windows, roof-mounted solar PV, LED lighting and a switch from gas oil to an electric heat pump. The total cost of the work to the Council would be £2.2 million of which the grant would cover £1.4 million, leaving Kent County Council responsible for only 36% of the costs.

The second grant was for a two-year programme for the Dover Discovery Centre, which was undergoing a multi-million-pound refurbishment and to co-locate several key services in the Dover area. The funding only related to the upgrade of the existing gas-fired heating and hot water system to electric air source heat pumps and a heat distribution network. The total cost would be £791,000 and the grant would supply £431,000, meaning that Kent County Council would cover only 48% of the costs.

4) Mr Murphy gave an update on Dungeness Power Station and noted that Damian Collins MP for Folkestone and Hythe, had given a speech in the House of Parliament on the situation and a Minister agreed and confirmed they would meet with him to discuss the matter further.

Mr Murphy said that the county had several areas which would receive Levelling Up funding. Canterbury City Council was to receive £19.9 million for Connect Canterbury: Unlocking the Tales of England, Dover District Council was to receive £18.1 million for the Dover Beacon bid, Folkestone and Hythe District Council were successful in their Brighter Future bid, Swale Borough Council was to receive £20 million for the Sheerness Revival bid, finally, Kent County Council's bid for the Dover Access Improvement project, improving the flow of traffic at Dover Port was successful. Overall, £123 million of levelling-up funding would be delivered to the county. Mr Murphy noted that a further round of funding was forthcoming for those districts and boroughs that were unsuccessful. Thanks were extended to Lee Burchill for his work and support on the bids.

5) Mr Hill gave an update on the Gypsy and Traveller Service. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Traveller Fund which had been launched May 2022 had welcomed bids for improvements to gypsy and traveller sites. The Gypsy and Traveller Service had submitted seven individual bids totalling £3.8 million, all seven bids were successful. The project plan was to provide essential improvements and maintenance on-site, ensuring that KCC provided residential sites that were safe and well maintained and fulfilled its legal obligations as landlord.

6) Mrs Prendergast said that the Council had launched a number of consultations seeking the views of residents and other stakeholders on proposals to inform any future decisions, the latest being the Home to School Transport Policy which had gone live on 25 January 2023.

The Kent Communities Consultation had been launched. KCC had experienced big increases in costs and less money to spend. The aim was to make sure that future community services, including children's centre and youth hubs, public health services for children and families, community services for adults with learning difficulties, the adult education offer and Gateways were available in the most efficient and sustainable way possible and residents were urged to have their say on proposed changes. The consultation was to remain open until 26 March 2023 and all residents were invited to take part by visiting Kent.gov.uk website where further information would also be available.

#### **4. Capital Programme 2023-33, Revenue Budget 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-26**

*(Item 5)*

*David Shipton, Head of Financial Strategy, was in attendance for this item.*

- 1) Mr Oakford introduced the report. Mr Oakford said that budget reviews had been completed with each of the Cabinet Committees and outlined some of the common themes that were raised. Members had been encouraged to submit suggestions for adjustments to the draft budget. Mr Oakford said that many Members had wanted the administration to present a range of alternatives to the budget proposals.. There had been many questions on the Safety Valve, but it was explained to Members that this was not part of the current budget as negotiations were ongoing. There was much interest in the state of the Reserves and the effect of any future drawdowns on the Council's financial resilience. Mr Oakford said that no formal suggestions for budget adjustments were passed to be brought to Cabinet. Mr Oakford thanked the Finance officers for their work and the balanced budget was to be put forward to full Council for their consideration.
- 2) Mr Shipton gave a PowerPoint Presentation (find attached). He outlined a summary of the comments that were raised during the review of the draft budget from the Cabinet Committees.

Responding to the comments, Mr Shipton noted that KCC had responded to the provisional settlement proposals from government and always responds to all government consultations on financial matters.

In past budgets, the savings and income as a percentage of the net budget was 2.8% in 2022-2023 and 3.2% in 2021-2022 but in the draft budget for 2023-2024 this had increased to 4.2%. There were significantly more policy savings than previously. Projected future savings in the medium term financial plan anticipated that this would be at around 3% in 2024-2025.

The Fair Funding Review was to be delayed by at least 2 years with no definitive date given for when the review would be carried out.

Mr Shipton said that if the Council was to become insolvent, there was a process to be undertaken which would ultimately lead to a Section 114 Notice. KCC was a long way from being insolvent as long as adequate reserves were maintained commensurate with the risks inherent in the budget.

There were questions posed by Members in the Cabinet Committees regarding insecure funding. There were three sources of insecure funding which the Council could not rely on to support the budget: the direct proceeds from the business rate pool with Kent districts, the new homes bonus grant and Kings Hill.

- 3) The Leader thanked the Finance Team and other teams from across the Council. The Leader said the risk of a Section 114 Notice was mitigated by adequate reserves being maintained and by savings being delivered as outlined in the budget.
- 4) Miss Carey noted the difficulty of achieving a balanced budget and said that challenges and suggestions to the budget from backbench Members had not been effective in resolving the underlying issues facing the Council. Miss Carey thanked Members and Finance officers.
- 5) Mrs Chandler responded to some of the comments raised during the review and noted that demand pressures were prevalent in statutory areas and allowances had to be made to account for them. In Children's Social Care, it was noted that preventive care measures had been maintained in the budget to a far greater extent than in other upper tier authorities in the country. It was confirmed that all future work within the directorate would remain children centred.
- 6) The Leader noted that the Council had to accommodate the huge demand pressures that had come from the statutory responsibilities, which made it very challenging to balance the budget within the year. The Council would have to work with NHS colleagues and other partners to ensure that public sector resources were marshalled effectively to ensure they were focussed on the most important areas.
- 7) Mr Murphy noted that all Cabinet Members were available to discuss the budget with all Members if they had any concerns or suggestions.
- 8) The Leader thanked Cabinet colleagues and officers for their work and responsiveness to concerns.

9) Mr Hill noted that it was important that discretionary funds be restored when appropriate, as preventive measures were needed to support and maintain the quality of life for residents of Kent.

10) The Leader said that there were three key factors to focus on looking forward: to deliver sustainable budgets, to work with NHS and other partners and sustaining and improving the Council's capacity as a strategic authority.

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

## **5. Kent Commissioning Plan**

*(Item 6)*

*Nick Abrahams, Area Education Officer – West Kent, was in attendance for this item.*

1) Mr Love introduced the report. Mr Love thanked head teachers, governors and academy trusts for their support and said that he had, and would continue to, meet with school leaders as the directorate deliver this strategic plan. Mr Love noted that the Kent Commissioning Plan (KCP) had been endorsed by the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 29 November 2022.

2) Mr Abrahams gave further details on the plan. The KCP was produced annually with changes tracked over time and the key changes made in this year's iteration were outlined.

3) The Leader said that the longer-term house building would put further pressure on school place provision. It was noted that developer contributions to education provision would be significant going forward.

4) Mr Abrahams said that work had been commissioned focussed on special provision and inclusion within mainstream schools. This work was to have an ongoing impact at an individual level, but it would take time for this to be reflected in the overall forecast. This year's Kent Commissioning Plan forecasts the number of children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and the rate of placement within special schools or mainstream schools. Future iterations of the KCP would provide more detail and take the Safety Valve into account.

## **6. Strategic Reset Programme**

*(Item 7)*

*Liz Sanderson, SRP Strategic Lead, was in attendance for this item.*

1) Ms Sanderson introduced the report.

2) The Leader noted that the Strategic Reset Programme was a mechanism to ensure that the Council would make the best use of limited resources and focus them on the most important areas. Ongoing monitoring of the programme and its priorities would be required going forward. Ms Sanderson responded that there would need to

be flexibility in the programme to respond to challenges and priorities that the Council faced in the future.

3) Mr Oakford said that with the limited budget and human resources, the Council had to focus on strategic priorities. It was noted that the relationships that Ms Sanderson and the Strategic Reset Programme team have built with the directorates must be maintained and Directors' focus was on achieving what was set out in the programme. Much of what was outlined in the budget was tied to the ongoing achievements outlined in the Strategic Reset Programme. Mr Oakford thanked Ms Sanderson and her team for their work and communication.

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