

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 9 November 2023.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mrs R Binks, Mr D L Brazier, Mr C Broadley, Mr T Cannon, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms K Grehan, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr S C Manion, Mr M J Sole and Mrs L Parfitt-Reid

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy and Mrs C Bell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer) and Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

162. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Thomas, Mr Meade, and Mr Lewis. Mrs Parfitt-Reid was present as substitute for Mr Meade.

Mrs Binks and Mr Baldock were present virtually.

163. Election of Vice-Chair

(Item 3)

1. Mr Manion proposed, and Mr Crow-Brown seconded that Mr Brazier be elected Vice-Chair of the Cabinet Committee.
2. Members voted on the election of Vice-Chair, and it was agreed by majority vote that Mr Brazier be elected Vice-Chair of the Cabinet Committee.

RESOLVED that Mr Brazier be elected Vice-Chair of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee.

164. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 4)

There were no declarations of interest.

165. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023

(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 were a correct record.

166. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director
(Item 6)

This item was taken after Item 8.

Mr James Pearson was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Libraries, Registrations and Archives had been awarded the Customer Service Excellence Award for 2023 which had been held by the service since 2010. During the assessment sites were visited across the service including ten libraries, a mobile library, Kent Archives, Sevenoaks Museum and Oakwood House. Mrs Bell thanked all the staff within the service for their efforts and congratulated them on the achievement.
 - (b) Temporary local studies collection access, based in the Shepway Youth Hub building at 5 Grace Hill, would be available in Folkestone town centre from Monday 20 November 2023. Mrs Bell said long term options continued to be explored for the reopening of a permanent town centre library for Folkestone and full library services would continue in the meantime and be delivered from the nearest alternative libraries.
 - (c) The Library at Dover Discovery Centre closed on Monday 30 October for essential works to take place. In addition to library services, the building, when works were completed, would host a nursery, adult education centre, the good day programme and integrated children's services. For the duration of the work temporary library services would be offered at the Gateway building from Monday 13 November.
 - (d) The Herne Bay Library reopened on 24 October and feedback had been positive. Mrs Bell was looking forward to visiting the launch event on 10 November.
 - (e) Mrs Bell explained why Dover Discovery Centre and Herne Bay Library had undergone renovation works and Folkestone Library remained closed. She said Dover Discovery Centre was a planned joint project with Dover District Council, had had funding set aside in the Major Capital Programme for a number of years and received funding from external funding schemes. Herne Bay Library had a similar history with decisions going back to 2013.
 - (f) In October Mrs Bell joined the Culture and Creative Economy Service at Kent Libraries to welcome Mr Darren Henley CBE, Chief Executive of Arts Council England to experience the Council's Playground project. This project was a unique programme of creative activity for babies and their families to promote the importance and positive impacts of creative play.
 - (g) Mrs Bell attended the Creative Kent Conference in October where cultural leaders came together to reflect on priority themes of workforce, next

generation and placemaking, and to hear about the emerging national picture.

- (h) The John Downton Awards, an art exhibition held at Sessions House, would open in November. The exhibition was inspired by Miss Hilda Downton in memory of her brother John Downton and celebrated the creativity of the county's young artists.
- (i) Over 1,000 miles of the King Charles III England Coast Path had been completed and the Ramsgate to Whitstable stretch was now open.
- (j) Mrs Bell co-hosted a breakfast briefing in October with Active Kent and Medway which brought together Leaders and senior officers and Members from across Kent and Medway to discuss the importance of being physically active.
- (k) Mrs Bell attended the official opening of Oakwood House on 1 November 2023.

2. Mrs Bell and Mr Oakford responded to the following questions and comments from Members:

- (a) A Member asked about the steps being taken to restore Folkestone Library and to preserve it as a listed building, Mr Oakford said the Council continued to look at the options available whilst considering the Council's current financial situation. He said the Council currently did not have the funds needed to restore the building.
- (b) A Member asked about the coverage of the mobile library service and Mrs Bell said this was a popular service within communities. Mr Pearson noted the importance of expanding the service and welcomed ideas on how the potential of the service could be maximised, alongside physical libraries, and recognised the significance of the mobile service for those who could not access services any other way.

3. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:

- (a) Visit Kent had been awarded Destination Management Organisation of the year at the UK awards for excellence in 2023.
- (b) Under the No Use Empty (NUE) Scheme six self-contained flats with a community room had been built at a site of a derelict former dance studio in Folkestone. This was funded by a NUE loan for £820,000 and top up funds from Folkestone & Hythe District Council. Construction on 24 business units at Honeywood Parkway, also under the NUE scheme, were due to be completed in Autumn 2023. This was the biggest NUE commercial unit that had been completed by the Council and would make a positive contribution to the economy of Dover and reinforce connections with the continent.

- (c) The Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) would open to new applicants on 21 November and the launch event would be opened by Ella Brocklebank, Head of Communications and Business Development, Jenner Construction Group, with introductions to the scheme made by Sir Paul Carter. Mr Murphy paid tribute to Sir Paul Carter and the KMBF team for the success of the scheme.
 - (d) Mr Murphy attended the Kent and Property Market along with the Leader, to promote the annual Kent and Property Market launch brochure. The event was attended by over 300 people.
 - (e) On 10 November Mr Murphy would visit Panettone in Aylesford, for the official opening of an 800,000 square foot distribution centre.
4. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following:
- (a) The Economy team continued to work on the transition of the Local Enterprise Partnership following the closure of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. The work was underpinned by the Kent and Medway Economic Framework which was currently being finalised.
 - (b) Kent Ambassadors visited the border force facilities at the Port of Dover to see how work was undertaken in relation to illegal smuggling of drugs and tobacco.
 - (c) The Kent Food Partnership led by Produced in Kent organised a Kent food Summit at the University of Kent on 6 October 2023. Highlights of this had been incorporated in the draft Kent Food Strategy currently being developed.
 - (d) Funding had been secured for the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Service to refurbish the KCC owned GRT sites and work began in October on the first of the sites. The works meant that four further pitches would be available in the next three months.
 - (e) Trading Standards had carried out safety checks on premises storing and selling fireworks. The team also looked at illicit tobacco and a joint operation with Kent Police Neighbourhood Taskforce had removed a significant amount of illegal tobacco from shops in Maidstone.
 - (f) The Kent Scientific Services team had been working with Mid Kent College to support their technical education programme, specifically the T level courses in science. The laboratory was recognised at an event at the science museum in London.
 - (g) Mr Jones thanked all the operational teams who supported businesses and communities during Storm Ciaran.

RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

167. District Visits Programme

(Item 7)

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and highlighted the importance of ensuring a good connection and good communication between the Council and the districts.
2. Members welcomed the visits and commented that they found them enjoyable and useful.
3. It was suggested that invitations to the visits be extended to all Members of the Council should they wish to attend.
4. The Chair endorsed Members' comments and thanked all those involved in arranging and delivering the visits.

RESOLVED to note the future visits programme and that invitations to attend the visits be extended to the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services.

168. Initial Draft Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-27

(Item 8)

This item was taken after Item 5.

Mr Peter Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services), Ms Zena Cooke (Corporate Director Finance) and Mr Kevin Tilson (Finance Business Partner, GET) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oakford introduced the Initial Draft Budget 2024-25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-27. He said 2023 had, so far, been a challenging year financially and the Council was currently looking at a £23million overspend this year. He said savings found this year were one off savings as opposed to reoccurring savings that would carry forward into next year. Mr Oakford explained that £46million worth of savings had been identified for the draft budget 2024-25, however the challenge of delivering those savings was yet to come. Mr Oakford stressed there was still a lot of work to be done and savings of just under £50million needed to be identified before the final round of budget scrutiny in January 2024. Mr Oakford thanked all those involved in this work.
2. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, explained that the budget for Economic Development was £4.5million per annum and year to date there had been a £329,000 underspend. For 2024-25 a saving of £80,000 would be made and an additional £200,000 income revenue would be committed to the Council's budget under the No Use Empty Scheme. Mr Murphy said the Council was working with external partners to get the best value for Kent and its residents.
3. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services provided a summary of the Community and Regulatory Services Budget. Mrs Bell said there was a current approximate £359,000 underspend on the £25.7million budget and the majority of the underspend was in Libraries, Registration and

Archives owing mainly to registration income. There was also underspend in Trading Standards and Kent Scientific Services. Altogether there was a spending proposal increase for the 2024/25 budget of around £758,000. A total of £789,000 savings was proposed which mainly included the Community Wardens service, increased income from the Kent Scientific Services, a review of all fees and charges across all services, an increased contribution of the Coroners service delivered in Medway, and small transformation and efficiency savings.

4. Mrs Bell, Mrs Holt-Castle and Mr Oakford responded to the following questions and comments from Members:
 - (a) A Member asked for clarification regarding the funding of the Coroners Service and Mrs Holt-Castle said the Council was responsible for providing and funding a coronial service for KCC and Medway administrative areas.
 - (b) A Member commented that a one-page summary of the topics that related to the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee would be helpful for future draft budget items.
 - (c) A Member asked about proposed changes to the capital programme and the effect long-term on the Council's community assets. Mr Oakford explained that the Council's buildings had suffered from underinvestment for many years, and money from Council Tax and government grants did not cover the expenditure of the Council. Therefore, non-statutory areas were having to be reviewed to ensure the Council continued to deliver services to the most vulnerable residents.
 - (d) A Member asked about the Council engaging in additional external support to identify solutions that enable future spending growth (para 4.7 on page 38 of the agenda pack) and whether this cabinet committee's portfolio area would be considered. Mrs Bell said this was not currently happening but could be considered in the future.

RESOLVED that the initial draft capital and revenue budgets including responses to consultation be noted.

169. 23/00091 - Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy

(Item 9)

Ms Ellen Schwartz (Interim Deputy Director Public Health) was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Schwartz introduced the report and provided an outline of the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy. Ms Schwartz explained there were six priority outcomes where wider determinants of health were explicitly mentioned and the strategy involved working jointly across all the partners in Kent and Medway to jointly promote and improve health and wellbeing.
2. A Member asked about specific practical examples for improving health and wellbeing, Ms Schwartz said the strategy was a high-level document and vision statement. In terms of a specific example, she referred to the Green Social

Prescribing Strategy. Ms Schwartz said it was recognised that social isolation was an issue due to, for example, lack of digital access in certain age groups and a shared understanding between partners, including districts, boroughs, and parishes of what was available and working together to improve access could have a positive impact in this area.

3. Mr Murphy said broadband could help reduce isolation and the Council was encouraging suppliers to focus on rural areas to ensure people were not left isolated.
4. Mrs Holt-Castle said 80% of health and care outcomes were affected by wider determinants, and services which fell under the cabinet committee's scope were already helping in this regard. This was the first time the Kent and Medway health system had engaged all of these services and it was therefore a significant opportunity to recognise what the services already do and how more could be done.
5. A Member stressed the importance of actions and training, and better communication between health and care sectors. Ms Schwartz said it was an achievement to bring together many different organisations and agree a set of outcomes they would contribute towards a joint preventative approach. The next step was the agreement of an action plan.

RESOLVED to endorse to Cabinet the proposed decision to approve the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy on behalf of KCC.

170. Positive Wellbeing Pilot Service - Evaluation Report

(Item 10)

Mr Ian Baugh (Head of Business Development), Ms Rebecca Law (Business Development Manager) and Professor Gina Rinehardt (Essex University) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item and referred to the positives of the service in terms of monetary value and highlighted the importance of evaluating the cost avoidance aspect to inform policy and decision making going forward.
2. Mr Ian Baugh introduced the report which provided an update on the evaluation findings for the Positive Wellbeing social prescribing service delivered by the Community Warden service between June 2020 and December 2022.
3. Ms Rebecca Law provided a summary of the evaluation findings and the future direction for positive wellbeing.
4. Professor Gina Rinehardt from Essex University provided a presentation by way of a series of slides which were circulated to Members prior to the meeting.
5. Members discussed how the Pilot had demonstrated the importance and value of social prescribing and the work of the community warden service in providing this, noting the potential for the service to save money in other areas, and hoped the service could be maintained by a viable Community Warden service in the future. Mrs Bell agreed with Members' comments but noted that, in terms

of potential reductions to the Community Warden service, it was a discretionary service and there was a need to balance the Council's 2024/25 budget.

6. A Member suggested the service could be delivered by a third party, for example, within districts and parishes, and by encouraging people struggling with isolation to join voluntary organisations, for example those that are widowed. Ms Law said the service could be delivered, in a number of ways, by existing services within the Council, for example librarians, and also voluntary and public sector services. Ms Law said that social isolation was not restricted to elderly people and could be experienced by anyone for any number of reasons.

RESOLVED to note the evaluation findings and comment on the future direction of the Positive Wellbeing service.

171. Youth Unemployment and Apprenticeships (Item 11)

Mr David Smith (Economic Advisor) was in attendance for this item.

Mr Manion declared an interest in that he was an employer in Kent.

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and asked Members to bear in mind that 89.7% of businesses in Kent employed between 0 and 9 people and highlighted that not all businesses had the revenue and resource to take on apprenticeships. However, Mr Murphy stressed that the Council was striving hard, including through the Employment Taskforce, to improve apprenticeship schemes.
2. Mr Smith introduced the report which provided updated information on unemployment statistics and apprenticeships and suggested that a paper be brought back to the committee at a future meeting to look at the wider context of the employment situation and the measures being taken to improve employability including career advice and skills levels being achieved by schools and colleges.
3. Members welcomed a more detailed report and action plan on how the level of skills and aspirations for more skilled jobs could be raised, and the identification of a wider variety of careers.
4. The Chair agreed to speak to the Chair of CYPE Cabinet Committee regarding unemployment and apprenticeships agenda items at future meetings.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note the report and;
- b) note that the Cabinet Committee for Children, Young People and Education be invited to consider the same issues at one of its future meetings and that a further analysis be presented in the new year, taking into account changes in Government policies and funding.

172. Work Programme 2023/2024 (Item 12)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme 2023/24.