

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 21 May 2024.

PRESENT: Mr S Holden (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr T Bond, Mr T Cannon, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr A R Hills, Mr M A J Hood, Mr H Rayner, Mr D Robey and Mr A Sandhu, MBE

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE:

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Broadley, Mr Dendor, Mr Lewis and Ms Dawkins for whom Dr Sullivan was present.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 5 March 2024 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

4. Verbal Updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

1) Mr Baker said that good progress was being made with the Highways Term Maintenance Contract and with the review of Joint Transportation Boards (JTBs).

Mr Baker met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the JTBs on 25 April. It was a productive meeting and he was pleased to report there was representation from across Kent and also from Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC).

There was a strong consensus that there should be a form of local engagement to give local residents a voice in local highway issues. Several issues were raised around the importance of effective communication, realistic planning, and strategic engagement to address transportation and highway-related challenges. The next steps would be for officers to use the discussion points to prepare a draft report by end of June 2024 for further consideration on future options.

It was planned that the A299 Thanet Way was to fully reopen eight weeks early on 1 June, instead of 20 July as originally anticipated. Thanks were given to the contractors for this achievement and KCC highways staff who have assisted, particularly Byron Lovell and his team.

The works would improve and stabilise the underlying subsoil of the road and to stop the heave effect caused by the underlying clay making it safer and more resilient for traffic users.

Mr Baker gave an update on the Entry Exit System. KCC was still awaiting the 'Reasonable Worst-Case Scenario' from government. Stakeholders had been advised to base planning on July 2020 when Kent had severe traffic congestion. This had been taken forward. Planning was being undertaken based on the system being implemented on 6 October, although this was yet to be confirmed.

KCC continued to work closely with Home Office and Department for Transport to ensure the best options for Kent and had submitted bids to government for works to mitigate the impact on Kent communities and were awaiting responses.

There had continued to be high demand for permits for street works. The Street Works Team was meeting the chair of Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee to discuss the impact this demand had on Kent's network.

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

- The quality of the pothole repairs being done had improved. Updates on the Pothole Blitz work were available on the webpage on KCC's website: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/what-we-look-after/roads/potholes/pothole-blitz>
- Streetworks notifications were causing frustrations where they were very last minute or where school traffic was being affected by road closures.

3) Mr Thomas said that a newsletter had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. David Beaver had retired from KCC and he was thanked for his efforts working for Kent. Sue Reddick, the new Head of service for Waste and Circular Economy was welcomed.

There was a workshop at Ashford Borough Council where there had been discussion on the high ambition 'Net Zero' target for 2050 that had been set by Kent council leaders. This was not a 'business as usual' measure but a high ambition pathway. A Members' group was due to be established and Larissa Reed, Chief Executive Officer from Swale Borough Council was leading on the work. It was hoped that work that had been achieved through the Waste Resource Partnership could be incorporated.

It was 'No Mow May' and an opportunity to cease mowing lawns and other areas of grass. Over the last few years, amazing results had been achieved with 130,000m², the equivalent of more than 500 tennis courts of vibrant wildflower meadows springing up across the county, nourishing Kent's pollinator population. Members participating in the scheme were encouraged to share photographs of the results.

Kent Plan Tree was policy which committed that one tree was to be established for every resident in the county. 17,000 whips (bare root trees) had been planted in the previous year. 30% of the trees planted were on farms and 17% were on school sites. In terms of who had planted the trees, 48% were from the local community and 30% were from schools. Mr Thomas was delighted with officers' efforts on the planting of trees and KCC was to submit a bid for round 4 of funding.

Partnership working was very important and one of the recent initiatives that had been uploaded to the website was a 'Repair, Recycle and Upcycling' map, encouraging residents to use the facilities: <https://lowcarbonkent.com/reuse-and-repair-locator/>

If businesses wanted to get involved, contact details were included in the Members' newsletter.

Upcoming events relating to the environment had been listed on the KCC environment webpages, the most recent being World Bee Day which was on 20 May 2024.

4) Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:

- It was clarified that whips are slightly smaller than saplings. Whips were not suitable for all locations. Whips were harder to establish in urban environments.
- Sightings of Asian Hornets should be reported. The government had made an announcement about the Asian Hornet: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-plant-health-officer-urges-increased-asian-hornet-vigilance> Members were also advised to consult the guide from Kent Wildlife Trust: <https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/blog/asian-hornet-guide-kent>
- Both webpages had details about how to report sightings and the importance of preventing them from establishing here in Kent and the UK.

5) Mr Jones said related to streetworks, he needed to correct the 30% non-compliance figure quoted in the previous verbal update on 7 March as it seemed the update could have been misconstrued and not clear.

Of the 59 sites audited the compliance rate was over 93%, that was across all areas that were audited. Recent audited performance had found that there continued to be good compliance on all closures:

- 100% of those audited required a closure for the works being undertaken.
- No sites were identified where the road had been closed but the works not started.
- 16 sites were identified where the repair works had been completed and were awaiting backfill. Six of these had reinstatement works in progress at the time of the inspection.
- No sites identified where the works were completed but the road was still closed at the time of the inspection.
- Two were identified as having incorrect diversions to that which had been agreed.
- Two were deemed to be unsafe.

There were three Road Closure Inspectors in post with a recruitment process underway for a fourth inspector.

There was to be a slight delay in implementing Moving Traffic Enforcement as the DVLA had refused KCC's application to access their system known as KADOE. This prevented KCC gaining access to the details of a vehicle's registered keeper and therefore, KCC was not able to issue warning notices or Penalty Charge Notices. It was understood to be due to the DVLA implementing a new system and the policy was not to permit any new access until the new system was operational.

Officers were meeting with DVLA on 28 May with the aim to resolve the matter and get on with using the enforcement powers that government designated to KCC to help manage our road network and support the movement of traffic across it.

On 22 February 2024, the Department for Transport (DfT) launched their latest consultation on night flight restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. The DfT was proposing to maintain the existing regime for a further three-year bridging period whilst they awaited the outcome of several noise studies they had commissioned. This bridging period was to be in place from October 2025 to October 2028.

Whilst KCC welcomed the work being undertaken to better understand the impacts of night noise, the proposals meant the restrictions remained unchanged since 2017.

Officers had drafted a response to the consultation which aligned with KCC's existing policy on Gatwick Airport, along with our responses to previous night flight restriction consultations.

Night flight restrictions had a positive impact on the wellbeing of residents and so KCC's response specifically requests for night movements and noise quota limits at Gatwick to be reduced in order to give adequate respite to communities under flight paths.

KCC's response was to be published on the [kent.gov.uk](https://www.kent.gov.uk) website after the consultation closes on the 22 May 2024.

Following the examination of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application for a new Lower Thames Crossing which concluded in December 2023, the examining authority submitted its recommendation report to the Secretary of State on 20 March 2024. The Secretary of State was considering the recommendation.

It remained to be seen if there would be any further consultations, but the Secretary of State was required to take a decision on the DCO by 20 June, three months after receiving the examining authority's recommendation report.

There was then to be a six-week period when people could challenge the decision in the High Court through a judicial review. If the Lower Thames Crossing was granted consent, construction was to start in 2026 and the scheme was to be open for traffic in 2032.

KCC had gained access to Galley Hill and the route cause was being investigated, in order to understand what actions needed to be taken to reopen the road. KCC was working on the issue of HGV congestion and had reached out to Kent Police to enact a scheme to identify rogue HGVs and report back to operators.

The Kent Resource Partnership had received an award for our town 'binrastructure' project to promote and reward rubbish separation and recycling in Ashford Town Centre

The Resource Management and Circular Economy team had created a repair café network to encourage our community to consider whether their item could be reused and to help share best practice and standardise the reporting of carbon emission savings.

KCC had been accredited as an Institute of Environmental Management and Assessments (IEMA) training centre, that meant KCC could roll out a series of workshops to upskill staff in environmental awareness.

5. Performance Dashboard

(Item 6)

Matt Wagner, Interim Chief Analyst; Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy and Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report and said that it was sixth performance dashboard of the financial year, 2023-2024. There were 19 key performance indicators (KPIs); 12 were rated green, 5 were rated amber and 2 were rated red.

There had not been any red RAG-rated indicators in the previous report to the committee. The indicators rated red both related to Highways and Transportation, the first was 'customer satisfaction with delivery' and the second was 'Member enquiries completed within 20 working days'. Demand for pothole repair and routine faults remained extremely high.

The report also showed the proposed changes to indicators for 2024-2025 following the annual review that had been carried out.

2) Further to Members' questions, it was noted:

- The KPI relating to 'customer satisfaction with routine Highways' service delivery (100 call back survey)' was being discontinued due to Agilisys resourcing issues and it was noted that the contract with Agilisys was not maintained by GET but by corporate services. The ability of residents to let KCC know if they were dissatisfied with services was not affected by the removal of the KPI.
- The KPIs showed street works permits were issued and the permitted duration for works to take place but the data was not available about how long the works took in all cases. Where the works exceeded the length of the permit, this was treated on a case-by-case basis.
- More details around KPIs, HT04 and HT14, were to be brought to the committee.

3) RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard.

6. 24/00038 - Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) - 2024 Refresh

(Item 7)

Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport; Dan Bruce, Enhanced Partnership and Infrastructure Manager; and Stephen Pay, Planning and Operations Manager were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Baker introduced the report.

2) Mr Lightowler and Mr Bruce outlined the report.

3) Further to questions from Members, it was noted:

- There was a significant meeting structure countywide. District councils had been asked to form focus groups, similar to the Quality Bus Partnerships.
- The planning tool data helped officers to understand connectivity, showing gaps for particular groups and destinations. The data was used to then improve connectivity.
- There was a relationship with Amazon where staff used the FastTrack bus service for free, as part of the company's approach to sustainability. It meant their staff traveled by bus, not by car.

4) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Chittenden seconded and Members agreed the recommendation as outlined in the report.

5) Dr Sullivan asked for her abstention from the vote to be noted in the minutes. Mr Baldock asked for his vote against the recommendation to be noted in the minutes.

7. 24/00043 - Road Asset Renewal Contract *(Item 8)*

Alan Casson, Strategic Asset Manager and Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Baker introduced the report.

2) Mr Casson outlined the report.

3) Members asked questions and it was noted that:

- An extension of the contract would warrant a discussion at Cabinet Committee.
- A request was made for an annual report on the contract performance. Concerns were raised about the quality of the work and assurances were asked for about how we know the contractor can deliver the work at the price they have quoted in their bid. There were selection questions, for potential contractors to demonstrate their history of good quality work. There were also specific questions asked around quality asking potential contractors to demonstrate skills around programming, costing and technical ability. Prices were only submitted after these questions had been answered and were scrutinised, comparing the market to ensure sustainability as well as what was most commercially advantageous.

4) Mr Rayner proposed, Mr Bond seconded and Members agreed to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report subject to the removal of “+ up to 5 years extension”.

8. Kent Travel Saver - Pass Cost Increase - 2024

(Item 9)

Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Baker introduced the report.

2) Mr Lightowler outlined the report.

3) Members asked questions and it was noted that:

- The approach to bus services was different in areas across England and the United Kingdom. There were some places where bus travel was free for all young people under the age of 22 but it was recognised that there were financial constraints for Kent. It was also noted that many local authorities do not subsidise or run bus services.
- It was considered by some Members that the increase was too high. There were concerns about the timing of the proposed change. However, officers were commended for their work on the scheme. There was a clear environmental benefit to children travelling to school by bus.
- KCC did not run the bus services and did not have control over bus fares so this work was supporting residents to use buses for less.

4) Members resolved to note the report.

5) Dr Sullivan asked for it to be noted in the minutes that she voted against the motion.

9. 24/00035 - Contract for Receipt and Treatment of Street Sweepings and Highway Mechanical Arisings

(Item 11)

Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment &Transport was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.

2) Mr Jones advised that there was a correction to the recommendation outlined in the report. The delegation under part (ii) of the recommendation should refer to the Director for Environment, not the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services.

3) Members RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report, subject to the correction above.

10. Household Waste and Recycling Centres Contracts

(Item 12)

Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.

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

- The decision being considered was to commence a procurement process to award a contract for the sites that were operating in Kent. This was unrelated to any network review and the report referred to 17 sites, the same as was currently operational in Kent.

3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report.

11. Work Programme

(Item 13)

Members agreed to NOTE the work programme.