

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 20 June 2024.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mrs C Bell, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford and Mr R J Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs P Cole

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

48. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Watkins. Mrs Cole was present and Mrs Chandler was in attendance virtually.

49. Declarations of Interest

(Item 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

50. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 March 2024

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 21 March 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

51. 24/00054 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn 2023-24

(Item 4)

Cath Head (Head of Finance Operations) was in attendance for this item.

1. Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services introduced the report which detailed the overall Revenue and Capital budget outturn position as of 31 March 2024. The revenue overspend was +£12.4m, which included roll forward requests of £2.8m. Within the overall outturn position, there remained significant overspends in Adult Social Care of +£32.6m and Children's, Young People and Education of +£26.6m (with possible minor variations to the figures during the final stages of the year end processes and external audit). Mr Oakford noted the proposal to fund the £12m underlying overspend from the budget stabilisation smoothing reserves; however, it was noted that any draw down from the reserves weakened the council's financial resilience and any further overspends needed to be mitigated to ensure future sustainability.

Mr Oakford noted that the Capital programme spend for 2023-2024 was +£216.4m which represented 52.9% of the approved budget. This was a £192.7m underspend against the budget, which was split between a +£5.5m real variance and -£198.2m slippage/re-phasing variance. Recommendations to roll forward the rephasing into future years was detailed within the report.

The first quarterly report for 2024-2025 was due to be presented to the September Cabinet.

2. Mr Gough noted the considerable amount of work that had been done to reduce the overspend figure and thanked both Cabinet Members and Officers for implementing the spending controls introduced in the latter part of 2023 and reducing the projected £50m overspend. However, the Council was still presented with a £12.4m overspend which emphasised the scale of pressures within the policy areas of Adults, Children's services, particularly in relation to care placement costs, and SEN transport. Focus needed to remain on delivering the savings programmes and ensuring the growth rate of activity within those areas of spend did not impinge on other parts of the Council. Whilst Securing Kent's Future provided an effective framework, there remained a great deal of work to be done.
3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - Members reiterated the Leader's comments concerning the excellent work of officers and paid thanks to all those involved in reducing the overspend. However, whatever the result of the upcoming general election, it seemed very likely that austerity needed to remain in Kent.
 - In regard to Children's Services, there continued to be a number of reforms, particularly in relation to SEND services and this work was being done in collaboration with the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England. These changes were paramount to both improving the quality of SEND services through effectively targeting resources; and ensuring that spend was brought into balance with the funds available to reduce the burden on the Council Tax Payer. A report on those SEND transformation projects would be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet. In regard to the Schools High Needs Block funding, the Council entered into the Safety Valve Agreement which reduced the cumulative deficit arising from the existing forecast overspends until 2028; however, this was a temporary measure and work needed to continue to reduce the deficit and ensure spending was in line with the funding available. The risk of not reducing the deficit within the agreed Safety Valve timeframe would have a detrimental impact on both the Council and the Council Tax Payers.
 - Covid and the increase in inflation had put an enormous financial strain on Adult Social Care, however, the directorate had undertaken a considerable amount of work to reduce those costs and work continued

to be done in combination with the Integrated Care Board to reduce costs and deliver positive transformation.

4. Mr Gough thanked colleagues in finance for their work and recognised the monumental challenge they continued to undertake in ensuring the Council's future sustainability.
5. RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report.

52. Quarterly Performance Report, Q4 2023-2024 - Regular June report (Item 5)

Matthew Wagner (Chief Analyst, Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Wagner outlined the report for Quarter 4 (Q4) which set out the performance data up to the end of March 2024. Mr Wagner said that out of the 38 KPIs contained within the Quarterly Performance Report (QPR), 17 achieved or exceeded target (rated Green), 11 achieved or exceeded the floor standard but did not meet the target (rated Amber), and 10 did not meet floor standard (rated Red). The direction of travel analysis indicated 9 with a positive trend (2 more than the previous Quarter); 20 were stable or with no clear trend (one more than the previous Quarter), and 9 were showing a negative trend (2 fewer than the previous Quarter). Mr Wagner addressed the KPIs assessed as Red and the projected direction of travel, along with the proposed indicators for 2024/25.
2. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
 - In response to the (Red) Governance and Law KPI regarding the **% of Freedom of Information Act (Fol) requests completed within 20 days** – A Member training event was held to enable greater understanding of the challenges surrounding Fols which was well received. The principal challenge remained however in managing the increased volume of FOIs received with the same level of resource.
 - In response to the (Red) Governance and Law KPI regarding KPI concerning **% of Data Protection Act (DPA) Subject Access requests completed within statutory timescales** – the direction of travel continued to be on a declining trend; however, it was noted that there remained significant challenge in meeting the statutory timescales due to the inaccessibility of electronic files, with a majority of records (69,000) held in paper archive form. It was an extremely onerous task and was one of the principal reasons for delay. Mr Jeffrey paid tribute to the officers for their continued hard work despite increased demand.
 - In response to the (Red) Customer Services KPI regarding the **% of complaints responded to within timescale** – it was noted that there had been a 10% increase in the number of complaints received compared to the

previous year and this was again being managed with the same level of resource.

- In relation to the (Green) Growth, Economic Development and Communities KPI regarding the **Number of homes brought back to market through No Use Empty (NUE)** – tribute was paid to Mr Grimshaw and the team for their excellent work in bringing both commercial and residential properties back into use which generated revenue through taxes.
- In response to the (Red) Education & Wider Early Help KPI concerning the **% of Education, Health Care Plans (EHCPs) issued within 20 weeks** – the indicator was expected to remain below the target while the service balanced completion of the backlog of older cases for those children and their families who had been waiting the longest. Prior to the internal changes made in April 2023, the oldest case identified was 119 weeks; however, due to reorganisation within the team and the implementation of new ways of working, the oldest case to date was 44 weeks old, with an expectation to reduce this to 40 weeks by the end of June 2024. Overall staff output in processing new requests had considerably increased and this would be reflected in later performance reports.
- In response to the (Red) Education & Wider Early Help KPI concerning the **% of pupils (with EHCP's) being placed in independent or out of county special schools** – a number of significant reforms were underway and the KPIs presented in the report emphasised the drive for those required changes and to ensure performance levels were brought back to an acceptable level. Mr Love noted the recent consultation launch on the Special Schools Review.
- In response to the (Red) Children's Social Care & Early Help KPI concerning the **% of case holding posts filled by permanent qualified social workers** – KCC expanded the number of Frontline Pods for September 2024 which was a recruitment programme aimed to fast track graduates into Social Work training. One pod was initially established in the county in September 2023 to analyse the methodology along with KCC's own apprenticeship programme and in-house Step-up to Social Work initiative. From September 2024 there will be a pod in each of the four areas of Kent. Together with the Step-Up programme and apprenticeships, the pool of qualified Social Workers continued to increase.
- In relation to Children in Care, it was noted that KCC's figures remained within the lowest quartile of children per 10,000 which was a testament to the team of Social Workers and Early Help Workers in Kent, ensuring that children stayed safely within their families with the correct support in place.
- With regard to the percentage of Children in Care (excluding UASC) placed in KCC in-house foster care or with family/friends, KCC had to make provision within its in-house fostering service as a result of High Court judgments and it was therefore paramount that work continued to progress at pace to open a reception centre and new children's home estates in the coming 4 to 6 months

to reduce the demand on KCCs fostering resource. Furthermore, KCC was an established partner in the South East Fostering Hub Network, whereby all interested parties could access support in meeting the needs of complex children and was heavily aligned to the work being undertaken by health and the Ministry of Justice.

- In response to the (Red) Environment and Transport KPI regarding the **% of satisfied customers with routine Highways service delivery, 100 call back survey** – it was proposed that this be removed from the list of KPIs reported on and to reallocate this to be monitored under the new reporting tool. The new innovative system would ensure that residents could raise issues and receive automated prompt updates.

3. RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as outlined in the report