

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 Tuesday, 14 May 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Cannon, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms K Grehan, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr S C Manion, Mr J P McInroy, Mr J Meade, Mr A M Ridgers and Mr M J Sole

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

199. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

No apologies had been received.

Mr Baldock, Mr Hood, and Mr Manion were present virtually.

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

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

201. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024 were a correct record, subject to the recording of Mr Baldock as present virtually.

202. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registrations and Archives) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, paid tribute to Mr James Williams, Director of Public Health at Medway Council, and offered her condolences to Mr Williams' family and his colleagues in Medway.
2. Mrs Bell provided an update on the following:

- (a) The temporary library service provision for Folkestone Library remained in place and a public consultation would be progressed on the future long-term location. Timescales for the public consultation were to be confirmed.
 - (b) The Home Library Service delivered books and other library items direct to people's homes and a satisfaction survey was recently completed which achieved 99% customer satisfaction from 279 responses. A new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) relating to the Home Library Service had been created.
 - (c) Following the annual review for fees and charges the LRA service had started to introduce changes for 2024/25 which included necessary increases in response to the rise of inflation. Registration and archives fees and charges came into effect in early May 2024 with library fees and charges being introduced in June following a library system upgrade.
 - (d) The LRA service was preparing for the annual summer Reading Challenge called 'Marvelous Makers' which would engage young people in fun activity and reading over the summer holiday period.
 - (e) A multi-agency Kent Community Safety Partnership event on anti-social behaviour took place in March 2024 which Mrs Bell attended. The event included a number of excellent speakers and covered a range of anti-social behaviour topics.
 - (f) The coroner service delivered a record seven jury inquests during March 2024 and the investment in the new facilities at Oakwood House was having a positive impact on service delivery.
 - (g) Mrs Bell referred to the sad passing of Ms Debbie Large, Head of the Coroner Service. Mrs Bell said Ms Large's commitment to the service over many years had been instrumental in its development. She was nationally recognised for her expertise and would be sorely missed by the Council.
 - (h) The Resilience and Emergency Planning Service was preparing for the impact of the Entry/Exit System border checks as well as leading preparations internally for KCC. The Team continued to assess the implementation of the new Business Continuity Management System which would allow an improved governance regime.
3. The Chair expressed, on behalf of the committee, his condolences to the families of Mr James Williams and Ms Debbie Large.
4. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
- (a) Mr Murphy congratulated Mr Jake Body, part of the No Use Empty (NUE) team, on his Level 3 Chartered Institute of Housing qualification, and welcomed Mr Tom Henderson to Economic Development who would be investigating energy issues facing the county.

- (b) The Council would welcome a delegation from West Flanders (Belgium) on 11 June including the Governor of the Province of West Flanders and the Cabinet member for West Flanders Water, Rural, Fisheries, and Agriculture. The meeting would be hosted by the Leader and Mr Murphy and would commence with discussions concerning Kent West Flanders bilateral Co-Operation especially economic, environmental & greater cooperation via the Straits Committee. Following this meeting the West Flanders delegation would visit the Water Efficient Technologies Centre at East Mailing.
 - (c) On 18 April 2024 Mr Murphy met with Cllr Catherine Mornindesally from Normandy Regional Council to discuss greater ties between Normandy and KCC with a focus on economic and environmental issues.
 - (d) Sittingbourne was going to be home to a net zero carbon logistics park thanks to a £150m vote of confidence by the site's owners, Panattoni. As the largest logistics real estate developer in the UK and Europe, the company would create Panattoni Park Sittingbourne on a site near Kemsley, and offer a total of 644,000 sq ft, split between two units. When built and occupied, the 26-acre site will offer the prospect of 1,069 new jobs for Swale. Panattoni is targeting net zero carbon development with an expected BREEAM sustainability rating of 'Excellent' and an EPC rating of 'A'. All units are to be developed with enhanced sustainability measures within the base specification, including the installation of roof-mounted photovoltaic panelling and electric vehicle charging points.
 - (e) BP pulse acquired Ashford International Truckstop, one of Europe's largest truck stops, unveiling ambitious plans to help Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) electrify.
5. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following operational matters:
- (a) Work on the Council's Mineral and Waste Local Plan had recently been transferred to the Economic Development Portfolio. The Minerals and Waste Local Plan (KMWLP) sets out the County Council's 15-year strategy and policy framework and following consideration by County Council, the emerging Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination in May 2024.
 - (b) Work was ongoing to finalise the transfer of responsibilities from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) to Kent County Council on behalf of Kent & Medway. Whilst transition agreements were being finalised the Economy Team was developing the implementation plan for the Kent & Medway Economic Framework.
 - (c) Following the relaunch in November 2023, the Kent & Medway Business Fund was now fully operational with a high level of applications being received.
 - (d) A workshop took place in April to kick off a new 'health & economy' workstream in partnership with the Kent & Medway Integrated Care System and linking into the Kent & Medway Economic Framework.

- (e) KCC recently received confirmation from the Department for Business & Trade that the Kent & Medway Growth Hub would be funded for 2024/2025. Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce was contracted to run the service which acted as a single point of contact to business support services available to help the county's companies.
 - (f) Work had started to transform and refurbish the Dover Discovery Centre. The works would take around a year and would enable KCC services and Dover District Museum to be better delivered from the town centre building. For the duration of the works a temporary library service was being offered from the nearby Dover Gateway. Since April, following the successful bid for grant funding from the British Library, the library service had had virtual tours live across 31 of its county libraries, accessible via kent.gov.uk.
 - (g) The Community Warden staff consultation had closed, and data was being assessed to allocate wardens to individual communities in line with the geographic allocation policy. Discussions were taking place with several parish and local councils regarding funding or sponsoring a warden in their communities. KCC Community Wardens participated in the Multi-Agency Event for Safety in Action Week at Dreamland in Margate, to large groups of primary school children.
 - (h) Kent Scientific Services had a record business year in 2023/24 which saw an increase in samples received of almost 20% from the previous year.
 - (i) Trading Standards had secured grant funding from the Office for Product Safety and Standards to continue to provide the protective infrastructure preventing the importation of dangerous consumer goods at the channel crossings for the year ahead.
 - (j) The Active Kent and Medway Team were delighted to be working with Sport England to deliver two new programmes. The first related to engagement with a new national programme to support National Governing Bodies and their local clubs to promote good practice and safe sport for children, young people and adults at a local level. The second focused on the activation of multi sports facilities across the county and the Council was awarded £143,000 by Sport England to pilot this programme. The Everyday Active programme continued to go from strength to strength and further information on their flagship campaign could be found on the [Everyday Active Kent](#) website.
 - (k) Mr Jones passed on his own sincere condolences to the family of Ms Debbie Large.
6. A Member commented on the importance of public transport for people wishing to visit libraries. Mr Jones referred to the Bus Service Improvement Plan which would be discussed at the next meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee and Mr Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registrations and Archives) said the library service could be accessed in a wide variety of ways in addition to services provided at library buildings, for example through online services, the mobile library service, and the home library service.

RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

203. 24/00032 - New contracts for the provision of Post-Mortem Facilities for the Mid Kent & Medway, North West Kent, North East Kent, Central and South East Kent coroner areas

(Item 6)

Ms Belinda Hooker (Acting Head of Coroner Service) and Mr Mark Rolfe (Interim Head of Community Protection) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item and explained the importance of the contract in providing the provision of mortuary and post-mortem services in Kent.
2. Ms Hooker introduced the report and clarified that the contracts covered the entirety of the county including Medway, with four trusts encompassing five mortuaries and four coroner areas.

RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision to:

- 1) Issue new contracts, via direct awards, for the provision of Post-Mortem Facilities in Mid-Kent and Medway, Northwest Kent, and East Kent, Central and South East Kent coroner areas to commence from 1 April 2024 for a period of 3 years (36 months) with the option of extending for up to a further 2 years (24 months).
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director for Growth and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to take relevant actions, including but not limited to, awarding, finalising the terms of and entering into the relevant contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary, to implement the decision.
- 3) Delegate authority to the Director for Growth and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Community and Regulatory Services to award extensions of contracts for commissioned services in accordance with the extension clauses within the contract (3 years + 2-year extension) as shown at Appendix B.

204. 24/00033 - Coroners Removals and Transfer Service Contract

(Item 7)

Ms Belinda Hooker (Acting Head of Coroner Service) and Mr Mark Rolfe (Interim Head of Community Protection) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item and explained the statutory duty of the Council in relation to the contract.

RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision to:

- (a) Tender for the award of Contracts for the Coroners Removal and Transfer Service for the Kent and Medway coroners areas for an initial 3-year period, with an option to extend for up to 2 years;

- (b) Delegate authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to take relevant actions, including but not limited to, awarding, finalising the terms of and entering into the relevant contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary, to implement the decision;
- (c) Delegate authority to the Director of Growth & Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to Award Renewals of the current contracts in accordance with the current clauses within the contract for the period 00:00 on 22nd May 2024 to 23:59 on 31st December 2024 to accommodate the required procurement process as shown at Appendix A.

205. 24/00034 - Decision to award contracts for Public Rights of Way Vegetation Clearance
(Item 8)

Mr Graham Rusling (Head of Service Public Rights of Way and Access) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item explaining the purpose of the proposed decision, and Mr Graham Rusling provided a summary of the report.
2. Members welcomed the splitting of the work into 10 lots and a Member commented on whether this would result in an onerous process and discourage prospective contractors. Mr Rusling explained there was a correct process around procurement, and contractors were supported through the process.

RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision to:

- (i) AGREE the re-procurement and the award of new contracts for PRow vegetation clearance, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, for a further period of five years and an allowable extension of two years subject to performance; and,
- (ii) to DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth and Communities to take other relevant actions, including, but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A.

206. Performance Dashboard
(Item 9)

Mr Matthew Wagner (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Matthew Wagner, Chief Analyst, introduced the report which set out the performance of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators for Quarter 3 of 2023/24 along with the KPIs and targets proposed for reporting 2024/25 performance.

2. A Member referred to KPI ED05 and asked whether the No Use Empty scheme applied only to houses and Mr Grimshaw explained it applied to empty residential properties being brought back into use and not commercial properties.
3. Mrs Bell highlighted, in relation to Appendix 2, that some of the targets had been increased substantially and commended officers particularly in light of the Council's financial pressures on resources.

RESOLVED to note the performance report for Quarter 3 of 2023/24 and the KPIs and targets proposed for 2024/25.

207. Kent County Council's support for Apprenticeships, Community Learning and Skills in the context of the Kent economy

(Item 10)

Mr David Smith, Economic Advisor, and Mr Mike Rayner, The Education People, were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and Mr Smith introduced the report and explained that a similar presentation would be considered by CYPE Cabinet Committee. In addition, a paper would be submitted to the Employment Taskforce which brings together the organisations across Kent responsible for apprenticeships, community learning and skills, including Kent County Council and Medway Council.
3. Mr Mike Rayner from The Education People provided a presentation, a copy of which was appended to the report.
4. Members commented that most employers in Kent were small businesses, asked how a small business could apply for an apprenticeship and questioned the opportunities that were available to young people who were not academic. Mr Smith said gaining skills through apprenticeships was a route for those without academic qualifications and the paper looked at practical ways that small businesses could take on apprenticeships, for example improving the way the apprenticeship levy was shared and methods of advertising apprenticeships. He said a practical programme would be developed over the next few months.
5. Members discussed the level of education and skills within the UK compared to elsewhere in Europe, the attitude towards obtaining academic qualifications, and the adequacy of the career advice service in schools. The importance of building relationships with companies to ensure a county wide plan and to provide opportunities to join national companies was stressed. Mr Smith said there was a challenge in relation to the lifestyle and career ambitions of young people and schools were an important element of this. A programme would begin with schools to address the challenges.
6. Members discussed the need for collaborative working between schools, students, and businesses to inspire young people to work in particular areas and take on vocational training.

7. A Member asked what systems were in place for identifying 16-18 year olds who were NEET (not in education, employment or training) and Mr Rayner said this was the responsibility of The Education People and a NEET support service was in place.
8. A Member commented that Local Skills Improvements Plans (LSIPs) were crucial in terms of local leadership and ensuring the issue was addressed in a geographical way.
9. A Member stressed the importance of encouraging employers to base their businesses in Kent and bring up the level of education and skills in the workforce. Mr Smith said this was a competitive market and referred to the Kent and Medway Business Fund and the Inward Investment Agencies who dealt with companies who wanted to move to or expand their business in Kent. Connections with colleges meant specific courses could be created to enhance specific skills.
10. A Member suggested obtaining the views of school leavers as to what they feel they could have benefitted from at school and what was missing.
11. Members welcomed the presentation and supported the action points within the report.

RESOLVED to comment on the suggested actions being taken to meet current challenges and note the report.

208. District Visits Programme *(Item 11)*

Mr Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Colin Finch introduced the report and said future visits had been planned for Gravesham, Dartford, and Swale.
2. The Chair emphasised to Members the importance of supporting the District Visits Programme.

RESOLVED to note the report.

209. No Use Empty (NUE) *(Item 12)*

Mr Steve Grimshaw (Strategic Programme Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Steve Grimshaw introduced the report which provided an update on the No Use Empty scheme and updated Members on developments since the report was written.
2. Members asked how many houses were currently empty in Kent and what the causes were. Mr Grimshaw said there were approximately 7,200 long term empty properties (properties that had been empty for more than six months) and there were a variety of causes which included second homes and probate

issues. He said a number of properties were removed from the empty list due to councils reviewing Council Tax which affected the accuracy of the data. Mr Grimshaw highlighted that the Council worked in partnership with district councils who had the ability to charge a premium on properties that had been empty for a long period of time but not all the district councils had a full complement of staff engaged in empty property work. To provide loans to bring all empty homes back into use there would need to be a significant increase of funding.

RESOLVED to note the report.

210. Kent Film Office

(Item 13)

Ms Gabrielle Lindemann (Film Office Manager) and Mr Tony Witton (Culture and Creative Economy Manager) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item and highlighted the wider economic and tourism benefits the Kent Film Office brought to the county.
2. Ms Gabrielle Lindemann, Film Office Manager, set out the role of the Kent Film Office and used a recent commercial filmed in Broadstairs and Margate as an example of its work. The Kent Film Office was involved in providing support to the production company for example with parking, accommodation, locations, local crew, and marshals. Over £250,000 was spent on accommodation, £85,000 on locations, £20,000 on local security, and Thanet District Council received approximately £10,000 for parking. Ms Lindemann explained that the Kent Film Office took a 10% agency fee from the District Councils they worked with.
3. Mrs Binks declared an interest that her daughter worked in the filming industry and had filmed in Kent.
4. Mr Lewis declared an interest that he was a retired Film Extra who had filmed in Kent.
5. Members commented that the Kent Film Office was an asset to the Council and extremely useful in facilitating arrangements for productions filmed across Kent and contributing to the county's economy. The importance of promoting the use of historic buildings within Kent for filming was noted.

RESOLVED to note the report.

211. 'Project Gigabit' Broadband Programme

(Item 14)

Ms Liz Harrison (Strategic Programme Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and highlighted the broadband programme was not a specific KCC responsibility and the Council's role was to support and encourage the provider.

2. Ms Harrison provided an overview of the report which updated Members on the implementation of the Government's Project Gigabit programme in Kent and highlighted a few points.
3. A Member asked about homes in hard-to-reach areas and how many and where they were in Kent. Ms Harrison said this question had been put to the Department for Science and Technology regularly and she understood some modelling had taken place, but this had not yet been shared.

RESOLVED to note the current position and provide the Cabinet Member any comments on the proposed approach.

212. Work Programme 2024/2025

(Item 15)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.

213. Future Meeting Dates

(Item 16)

The Future meeting dates of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee were noted.