

From: Linden Kemkaran, Leader
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

To: **County Council – 6 November 2025**

Subject: Final draft of the Council's Strategy, ***Reforming Kent 2025-2028***.

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary:

Reforming Kent 2025-2028 is the Council's new Council Strategy, replacing the previous administration's Strategy, *Framing Kent's Future*. The strategy was presented as a draft to the County Council in September and has now undergone a period of engagement and is presented as a final draft. The strategy sets out the challenges facing the Council over the next 3 years and the aims and objectives of the administration to meet these.

Recommendations: County Council is asked to:

(1) **Approve** Our Council Strategy, 'Reforming Kent 2025-2028'.

1. Background

1.1 The draft of '*Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*' (Appendix A) was presented to County Council in September for consideration and has now been developed into a final draft after a period of engagement. It replaces the previous administration's strategy, *Framing Kent's Future* and sets out the aims and objectives of the administration within the context of the local government policy landscape and the legacy inherited. It is a three-year strategy given the implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the proposed creation of new council structures in Kent and Medway in 2028. It is, however, still strong in its ambition to ensure that Kent's residents feel they are heard, the services they receive are good value and that the Council is standing up for the residents of Kent on those areas which matter most to them.

2. Our Council Strategy '*Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*'

- 2.1** The document is not intended as an exhaustive list of everything the Council does but is focused on establishing a reformed council, the ambitions we want to meet and the objectives and priorities that will be delivered.
- 2.2** The Strategy is focused on 4 aims that are structured around the areas of greatest challenge and opportunity and each of these are supported by a number of objectives and priorities.

The four aims and supporting objectives are:

1. Putting Kent Residents First
2. Reforming Kent County Council
3. Supporting Residents that need help
4. Building Better Communities

For each of the objectives the document sets out the local context, why this matters to Kent, whilst outlining the priorities the Council will address.

3. Engagement and feedback

- 3.1 Following the debate at County Council in September where Members gave comments on the draft strategy, the document was placed on the Lets Talk Kent website from 30 September- 20 October inviting feedback from the general public. A total of **282 responses** were received and the feedback has been largely positive: **144 positive** (51.1%), **52 negative** (18.4%) and **86 neutral** (30.4%).
- 3.2 The positive feedback was supportive of the emphasis on value for money, the common sense approach, tackling issues such as the border challenges, supporting local businesses, the support for the countryside and rural communities and a pragmatic re-focusing of climate policy.
- 3.3 One overarching comment, which was indeed made during the County Council debate in September by Members and subsequently through our engagement, is that the strategy is only for 3 years and therefore its impact on the challenges it seeks to address will be limited. Given the challenging operating environment, with the uncertainty of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) we cannot realistically commit to a strategy beyond this time period and it is acknowledged that this is not a sufficient time to make a real impact on tackling systemic challenges. As such we have now made a more explicit reference to this in the revised strategy to acknowledge that whilst the ambition remains high and the intention strong, we cannot solve challenges that have long faced both the Council and the public sector for many years, within such timescales. However, we can make a start and we should continue to be both ambitious and committed to making the necessary changes in those areas as outlined whilst remaining realistic about what we can achieve. This is reflected further in our response on delivery plans and measuring impact.
- 3.4 Where comments were negative or raised questions even where broadly supportive of the general policy direction these have been looked at in further detail. We have set out below the constructive feedback and challenge received and our response to this.

3.5 Key themes of feedback:

- 3.5.1 Tone and political nature of the strategy** – there were some recurring comments about the strong political tone of the document and that in some areas of the strategy, particularly around supporting vulnerable people it was felt the language could be more neutral and supportive, there was some concern expressed around the emphasis on personal responsibility.

Response – The 2025 local elections saw a significant shift in the Council's political make up, with Reform winning a significant majority. The new administration has therefore undertaken to set out their ambitions and objectives as a new political group in Kent. '*Reforming Kent*', is reflective of the ambitions of the new political administration for the County and the type of Council it believes is required to meet the challenges faced- it is unapologetic in setting these intentions out clearly.

On language and tone; the strategy sets out strong support for the vulnerable in society, and a clear commitment to the safety net, which should be there to support residents when they need it. The emphasis within the aims and objectives is on early intervention and prevention, with a clear commitment to dignity and choice for residents in the support they receive. However, support from public services must be balanced against personal responsibility and the strategy sets out that we intend to support families, parents and individuals so that we can help people to live the best lives they can whilst acknowledging the significant challenges around demand for public services. The priorities on lobbying in the best interests of Kent are further commitment to supporting Kent's residents. Ensuring we get fair funding from government, for the challenges we uniquely face will help the Council to meet our resident's needs, and is testament to our commitment to ensuring that the right support is available to those that need it.

- 3.5.2 Commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**- some feedback raised concerns about the strategy's ongoing commitment to the PSED.

Response- The strategy makes a clear commitment to reviewing the existing Corporate Equality Objectives of the Council, which are due to come to an end in 2026. These objectives were set for a period of 4 years by the previous administration and it is only right that these are reviewed. There is also a commitment to ensuring equality and fairness in our recruitment and that we continue to meet our commitments to PSED but in a more meaningful way, that can be supported more widely by our staff and public partners. Following the adoption of the Council Strategy, there will be a review of all our policies and this will include those that support the PSED, to ensure they are fit for purpose and align with the administration's focus on ensuring a meritocratic approach at all levels.

- 3.5.3 **Intent vs delivery-** there were a range of comments, that even if supportive of the policy direction people wanted more detail on how the aims and objectives of the strategy would be delivered. Whilst the statement of intent was supported, there was a call for more action.

Response – *‘Reforming Kent’* sets out the broad ambitions and objectives of the Council and the priorities for the next 3 years. Whilst this goes some way to setting out the policy areas that will be looked at, the strategy is not intended to set out the detail. For example, there was strong support for the direction of travel for SEND support, for school measures such as banning smartphones and a refocusing of climate change policies but a frustration that more detail was needed on how these aims will be delivered with partners, including public bodies and businesses and in the case of SEND alongside parents. A general review of all KCC policies will take place subsequent to the adoption of the Strategy, and any necessary changes to existing policy and strategy will be taken forward through the usual governance routes. This has been the custom and practice when delivering strategic statements adopted by previous political administrations in KCC.

- 3.5.4 **Measuring impact** – The feedback criticised the lack of measurables within the strategy, with a request to have more detail on how the impact will be measured and priorities tracked. There were some suggestions of providing a stronger evidence base to ensure progress could be tracked.

Response: The strategy clearly sets out our commitment to reviewing our Quarterly Performance Report to ensure that this allows us to track and monitor progress against the objectives and priorities within the strategy. This, alongside a review of our directorate performance dashboards will help the Council to track progress against our new priorities and subsequent policies. It is right that this is embedded through the performance management of the Council, which drives the accountability of our services and the management actions that are taken as a result. These metrics will be reported through the usual governance routes to allow Member oversight. It must also be highlighted, as stated earlier in this report and the strategy itself, that this is a 3 year strategy and whilst performance metrics can measure and track progress against our new priorities, we should not set unrealistic metrics against challenges, which will not be fully resolved within the life of this strategy.

4. Changes to Reforming Kent 2025-2028

- 4.1 No substantive changes have been made to the structure of the document from the version considered by County Council at its meeting in September. As such, the vision, approach, aims and objectives remain the same. There have been some minor changes to wording to improve the overall flow of the document. However, following discussion and considering the public feedback

through the Let's Talk Kent website, some notable changes to the document include:

- Reworded introduction section to reference and acknowledge the shorter timeframe for the strategy and the impact of LGR.
- An additional specific priority for the development and implementation of the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- A specific additional priority for delivering the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy.
- Reflected the need to incrementally expand investment in highway maintenance given the scale of the funding backlog and necessary additional support required from Government.
- An additional priority to use our role as the Local Transport Authority and LTP5 to encourage planning authorities to more fully consider transport needs when considering new developments and refreshing their Local Plans.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Following adoption of the Strategy by County Council, the document will be designed and published onto the KCC website.
- 5.2 As mentioned quarterly performance reporting will allow for Member oversight of the ambitions and objectives set out through the usual governance routes. As policies are closed down, revised or replaced to reflect the new strategic direction, these will be taken through the usual governance routes for agreement.

6. Recommendations

6.1. County Council is asked to:

- (1) **Approve** Our Council Strategy, 'Reforming Kent 2025-2028'.
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7. Relevant Director:

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance – david.whittle@kent.gov.uk

8. Background Documents

Appendices:

Appendix A *Reforming Kent, 2025-2028*