

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 10 September 2025

PRESENT: Mr C Hespe (Chairman), Mr P Chamberlain (Vice-Chair), Mr A Brady, Mr D Burns, Mr W Chapman, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Finch, Mr A J Hook, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr H Rayner, Mr N Wibberley and Mr P Stepto

ALSO PRESENT: Mr B Collins

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer)), Ms C Maynard (Head of Commercial and Procurement), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr M Cheverton (Head of Real Estate Services), Ms J Taylor (Head of Capital) and Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst)

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

#### **11. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

Apologies were received from Mr Luke Evans and Mr Mark Hood. Mr Stepto was present as substitute for Mr Hood.

Mr Mulvihill had joined the committee and filled the Reform UK vacancy.

#### **12. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda**

*(Item 3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **13. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2025**

*(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

#### **14. Performance Dashboard for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department**

*(Item 5)*

1. The Chief Analyst, Mr Matt Wagner, introduced the report which included Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for services within the Chief Executive's Department (CED) and Deputy Chief Executive's Department (DCED) up to the end of June 2025.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) A Member asked, regarding KPI CS07 – *Percentage of complaints responded to timescale* - for the proportion of complaints by directorate.
  - b) Regarding KPI FN06 – *Percentage of sundry debt due to KCC under 6 months old* - Members expressed concern that due to restructuring within the NHS and possible LGR, there was a risk that debt owed by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) would not be recovered. Officers confirmed that, in the event of LGR, any debt would be passed on to the new relevant local authority. The reported figure represented gross debt and not the net position and high-level discussions with the ICB were ongoing.
  - c) Regarding Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests (SARs) (KPI GL03) performance remained below acceptable levels, with the majority of SARs originating from the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Directorate. A pilot project with the Information Commissioner's Office was underway to address the challenges and resource issues, and future reports would include directorate-level breakdowns to better identify areas needing improvement.
  - d) Concerns were raised about the transparency of contact centre KPIs as the contract allowed performance exemptions during periods of exceptionally high call volumes, Mr Wagner clarified that the contract excluded these days from monitoring but the dashboard KPIs did include them.
3. The Chairman acknowledged the substantial effort behind the dashboard and praised the officers and administration for their work.
4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee notes the performance position for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department.

## **15. Fair Funding 2.0 Consultation**

*(Item 6)*

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mr Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) introduced the report. The Consultation marked the first major review in over a decade, aiming to update outdated funding formulas and redistribute resources more fairly. The current system, based on 2013–14 data, was no longer fit for purpose. The consultation proposed consolidating various grants into a single Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) based on each local authority needs against their ability to raise income through council tax banding.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) There was concern that the government expected councils to use their full council tax flexibility (up to 5%). Mr Shipton explained that the proposed funding floor mechanism may penalize councils that choose not to raise council tax to the maximum level, offering no protection against funding reductions.
  - b) Members questioned the transparency of the statistical modelling used in the Relative Needs Formula (RNF), particularly around deprivation and population projections. Concerns were expressed about the fairness of

redistributing funds based solely on council tax bands, as this may not accurately reflect service needs, especially for high-cost services like adult social care. Mr Shipton confirmed that the Council's response to the consultation included concern about the lack of statistical evidence to justify the use of indices of multiple deprivation.

- c) A Member raised concern regarding the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the spending review and the potential for a zero SFA for the Council. Whilst it was unlikely Kent would receive no funding, contingency arrangements were being actively discussed.
  - d) The increasing budget deficit and forecast gap for 2026–27 remained a concern and further savings or income generation would be required regardless of the consultation outcome.
  - e) Kent had benefited from business rate pooling with district councils, enabling business rate growth in the county including approximately £4million for the council's budget and £4million for regeneration initiatives. This arrangement worked well in two-tier areas and may be impacted by future local government reorganisation.
  - f) The outcome of the consultation was expected by the end of November, ahead of the Chancellor's Autumn Budget.
3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee notes KCC's response to the consultation.

#### **16. Update from the Contract Management Review Group (CMRG)** (Item 7)

- 1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader), Mr Paul Chamberlain (Deputy Cabinet Member) and Ms Clare Maynard (Chief Procurement Officer) introduced the report which provided an update on the Contract Management Review Group (CMRG).
- 2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) Attendees at CMRG receive a letter outlining the group's findings, both positive and negative, along with any follow-up suggestions. A few providers had been invited back as part of the forward plan to demonstrate how they had implemented recommended changes.
- 3. The Chairman thanked Mrs Maynard and her team, particularly Mr Bridger, the Strategic Commercial and Procurement Lead, for their close collaboration with the Department for Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE).
- 4. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee notes the report.

#### **17. 25/00058 - Freehold disposal of the former Rowhill Primary School, Stock Lane, Wilmington, Dartford DA2 7BZ** (Item 8)

- 1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the proposed disposal of former Rowhill Primary School, Stock Lane, Wilmington, Dartford DA2 7BZ.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) Some Members raised concerns about the absence of Local Member views in the papers. Officers clarified that views had been sought but no response was received at the time of writing, and the Local Member had since confirmed no objections.
  - b) Ms Spore explained that public consultation was only undertaken when required, such as for designated public open spaces, and that the Council followed its property management protocol. She noted that while there was consultation at the time of the school's closure, no further public engagement had occurred since. A Member suggested that greater public engagement could help protect the Council's reputation, especially in light of media scrutiny.
  - c) A Member questioned whether the site could be used for special educational needs (SEN) provision given current shortages. Mrs Spore responded that the site would require demolition and rebuilding, making it economically unviable, and confirmed that Education colleagues had ruled it out for future SEN use. She also assured Members that local plans and future development needs were considered during disposal assessments.
3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
  1. the disposal of former Rowhill School, Stock Lane, Wilmington, Dartford DA2 7BZ; and
  2. delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

**18. 25/00059 - Freehold Disposal of land at the junction of West Malling Bypass and South of the London Road, Leybourne**  
(Item 9)

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the proposed disposal of land at the junction of West Malling Bypass and South of the London Road, Leybourne. Mrs Spore explained that the land was acquired for highway purposes and was now surplus to the Council's needs. She confirmed that Local Members had been consulted and had raised no objections to the proposed disposal.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) A Member sought clarification on the nature of the land, asking whether it was agricultural and woodland, and whether the housing development would be on the agricultural portion. Mrs Spore clarified that while parts of the land had been used informally, it was not designated for agricultural use. The land was acquired specifically for the bypass project, and the unused portions were not formally set aside for farming.
3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:

1. the disposal of land at the junction of West Malling Bypass and land south of the London Road, Leybourne; and
2. delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

**19. 25/00060 - Freehold disposal of land to the south of Pratling Street, Aylesford**  
*(Item 10)*

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the proposed disposal of land to the south of Pratling Street, Aylesford.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) Clarification was sought by Members regarding the current use of the land. Mrs Spore confirmed that while there was a tenant currently using the site for grazing, this was a temporary, interim arrangement and not its designated use. It was confirmed that although the land was currently being used for grazing, it was not being sold as grazing land. The future use of the site, including any residential development, would be subject to the planning process, which was the responsibility of the local planning authority.
3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
  1. the disposal of land at Pratling Street, Aylesford; and
  2. delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

**20. 25/00061 - Freehold Disposal of land at Westcott Avenue, Gravesend DA11 7HP**  
*(Item 11)*

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the proposed disposal of land at Westcott Avenue, Gravesend, DA11 7HP.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) A Member raised concerns about the recurring pattern of acquiring large plots of land for educational purposes, only to later decide they were not needed. Mrs Spore responded that while it was difficult to comment on historical decisions, land purchases were often made based on availability rather than precise future needs. She noted that the site in question was located near both a secondary school and a newly built primary school, which may have influenced the original acquisition.

3. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
  1. the disposal of land at Westcott Avenue, Gravesend, DA11 7HP; and
  2. delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.
4. In accordance with paragraph 16.31 of the Constitution, Mr Stepto wished for it to be recorded in the minutes that he abstained from endorsing the decision.

**21. 25/00082 - Disposal of the former Oasis Academy, Egerton Avenue, Hextable BR8 7LG**  
*(Item 12)*

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the proposed disposal of the former Oasis Academy, Egerton Avenue, Hextable BR8 7LG.
2. RESOLVED that the Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
  1. the disposal of the former Oasis Academy, Egerton Avenue, Hextable BR8 7LG; and
  2. delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.

**22. Work Programme 2025/2026**  
*(Item 13)*

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme 2025/2026.

**23. 25/00057 - Property Accommodation Strategy - Strategic Headquarters (SHQ)**  
*(Item 14)*

**OPEN ACCESS TO EXEMPT MINUTES**

1. Mr Brian Collins (Deputy Leader) and Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) introduced the report regarding the Property Accommodation Strategy – Strategic Headquarters (SHQ). Ms Spore highlighted a non-material typographical error in the report at Section 3.5.1 where the last two options were ranked incorrectly and were in the wrong order.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:
  - a) Some Members expressed strong opposition to the proposed refurbishment of Sessions House and questioned its financial viability. Members commented on the building's state of disrepair and the cost of necessary repairs and ongoing maintenance. The proposal was criticised as short-term

thinking driven by potential Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It was noted that if LGR did not proceed the Council could potentially be left without a suitable operating base.

- b) Members highlighted the disproportionate costs in the longer term required to refurbish Sessions House compared to Invicta House.
  - c) Members emphasised the accessibility issues relating to Sessions House and the inadequacy of the building for those with mobility issues. Mr Collins acknowledged the challenges with accessibility and running costs at Sessions House, noting that efforts were underway to improve efficiency where possible but recognised the building's limitations. Mrs Spore explained that accessibility improvements had been made within existing financial constraints, but some upgrades would require significant capital investment.
  - d) It was commented that there was a need for contingency planning and financial reserves due to the unpredictable nature of refurbishment costs in old buildings.
  - e) A Member expressed concern over the exclusion of key financial details such as running costs and capital allocations from public documents.
  - f) A Member asked for clarity on possible council chamber provision at Invicta House, and Mrs Spore confirmed that while the atrium could accommodate a chamber, it was not included in the current base option of the previous decision and would require separate funding if pursued.
  - g) The assumption was that Block B of Sessions House would remain empty and not be occupied by staff. There could be capacity in Block B in the future at an additional cost.
  - h) A Member questioned the rationale for returning to office-based working given the success of remote working over recent years.
3. The Chairman proposed the motion to exclude the press and public for exempt business and it was agreed.
4. RESOLVED that, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.
5. The Chair put the recommendation to endorse the decision as set out in the report to the vote and the voting was as follows:

For (8)

Mr Burns, Mr Chamberlain, Mr Chapman, Mrs Emberson, Mr Finch, Mr Hespe, Mr Mulvihill, Mr Wibberley

Against (4)

Mr Brady, Mr Hook, Mr Stepto, Mr Rayner

Abstain (0)

*Carried.*

6. RESOLVED that the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee endorses the proposed decision to:
1. Agree to discontinue with the Preferred Option as set out in decision 24/00100;
  2. Given the proposed Local Government Reorganisation timetable indicated by Government, confirm Sessions House will continue to be the strategic headquarters for KCC for the remaining life of the Authority;
  3. Allocate £4m from the 2025-34 approved capital budget to enable the essential and urgent backlog maintenance works at Sessions House to be completed;
  4. Withdraw from the sale of Sessions House and Albert Street car park with immediate effect;
  5. Dispose of Invicta House and the associated car park as soon as practical to reduce holding costs and liabilities for the Council;
  6. Realign the capital and revenue budget as required to enable the above to be implemented;
  7. Delegate authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, to authorise the execution of necessary contractual and land agreements required to implement the above.