

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 6 November 2025.

PRESENT: Mr J Baker, Mr B Barrett, Mr B Black, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Mr M Ellis, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mr R Ford, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr S Heaven, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr S Jeffery, Ms L Kemkaran, Ms I Kemp, Mr A Kennedy, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Rich Lehmann, Mr M Logen, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr J Moreland, Miss D Morton, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr M Munday, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Mr T Prater, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Ricketts, Mrs S Roots, Ms C Russell, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr T L Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr G Sturley, Mr D Taylor, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr P Webb, Mr N Wibberley, Mr N Williams, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager) and Mr B Watts (Deputy Chief Executive)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

23. Apologies for Absence
(Item 1)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Mrs Lawes, Ms Nolan and Miss Randall.

24. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
(Item 2)

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer (Monitoring Officer) explained, in relation to Item 9 on the agenda - *KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway* – that in accordance with Section 21.73 of the Council's Constitution, dispensation had been granted to allow all Members to freely take part in the debate. There was therefore no need for Members who were also elected to district and borough councils to declare their interest.

25. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2025 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 September 2025 be approved as a correct record.

26. Corporate Parenting Panel - Minutes for noting
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel on 29 July 2025 be noted.

27. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 5)

- 1) The Chairman expressed his gratitude to Sarah Nurden for her outstanding work in organising the recent media event at the end of September promoting Kent's international rail connectivity. Her professionalism and dedication were instrumental in its success.
- 2) The Chairman explained that throughout the day the Adult Social Care directorate were showcasing Technology Enabled Care. The Chairman encouraged Members to visit the stall and learn about this helpful service.
- 3) The Chairman said he was honoured to host the recent Kent Civic Launch of the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal which brought together the RBL and the Kent Armed Forces community in united support. Ahead of Remembrance Sunday, the Chairman encouraged Members to attend local ceremonies held across the county on behalf of the Council.
- 4) The Chairman highlighted that November was National Care Leavers Month. He said this was a valuable opportunity for Members, as corporate parents, to show support for young people leaving care. He also flagged the upcoming Corporate Parenting Care Leavers Christmas Appeal which would be delivered in partnership with the Young Lives Foundation.
- 5) Members were informed of the sad news of the death of Mr John Fox. Members heard that Mr Fox served the people of Kent with dedication and integrity during his time on the Council, making a lasting contribution to local government and the community he cared deeply about. Tributes were made by Mrs Dean, Mr Brady, Mr Hood, Ms Kemkaran, and Mr Rayner.
- 6) The Chairman proposed a motion of condolence to the family of Mr Fox and this was agreed unanimously. A one-minute silence was held in his memory.

28. Questions
(Item 6)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 14 questions were submitted by the deadline and 14 questions were put to the Executive. 10 questions were asked and replies given. A record of all questions and answers is available [online](#) with the papers for this meeting.

29. Report by Leader of the Council
(Item 7)

- 1) The Leader opened her report by highlighting significant concerns regarding the current local government finance system. She explained that councils nationally had overspent by over 5% on adult social care, over 14% on children's social care, and over 25% on home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). Ms Kemkaran said this was unsustainable and expressed frustration that councils had still not received confirmation of their funding settlement, explaining that the uncertainty made it difficult for councils to plan their budgets effectively. The Leader explained that KCC had not applied for exceptional financial support, unlike several other councils and referred to KCC's 1.8% overspend at the end of Quarter 1 compared to the overspend of other councils during the same period.
- 2) Regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the Leader referred to the recent meeting of the Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Cabinet Committee where it was noted that KCC's Option 1A (a single unitary for Kent and Medway) remained the preferred option for Kent. KCC had produced its own business case, which highlighted the significant projected costs of LGR and demonstrated that Option 1A was the least likely to require an increase in council tax to cover the cost of disaggregating core services.
- 3) Turning to the Strategic Statement the Leader said the document reflected a clear focus on priorities for Kent. Key themes included promoting personal responsibility, supporting local businesses through a Kent-first approach, and placing greater emphasis on early years to help parents fulfil their responsibilities. Plans for elderly care included the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and preventative measures to maintain independence. Ms Kemkaran highlighted the progress made on highways since the election including over 22,000 potholes repaired, 250,000 square metres of roads patched, and 210,000 square metres resurfaced. Positive feedback had been received from residents regarding these improvements.
- 4) The Leader had recently visited Eurotunnel in Folkestone to look at the new Entry/Exit System (EES) and to discuss freight transport and motorway congestion. Two key barriers to rail freight through Kent were identified—overhead gantries and mismatched rail gauges—which could be resolved with investment. The Leader had written to the Department for Transport regarding this and would raise the issue at the upcoming Thames Estuary Fair Economic Growth All-Party Parliamentary Group.
- 5) The Leader confirmed KCC's role in supporting Virgin's bid for the international rail franchise, which included commitments to stop in Kent. A

September event at Ashford and Ebbsfleet stations brought together key stakeholders and Ms Kemkaran highlighted this as an example of successful cross-party cooperation.

- 6) The Leader referred to further engagement with the agricultural sector, including visits to Niab at East Malling and a roundtable event at Hull Park, Cranbrook which brought together landowners and farmers. She expressed concern about farm inheritance tax, which was damaging to Kent's farming industry. The Leader had written to the Chancellor urging reconsideration of this policy, noting Kent's importance as a major contributor to UK agriculture and soft fruit production.
- 7) Finally, the Leader reflected on the Administration's six-month anniversary and emphasised the resilience and strength of the current Administration, noting that while leaner in number, it was now more focused and prepared to deliver for Kent.
- 8) Mr Hook, Leader of the Opposition, acknowledged the period of remembrance ahead of Armistice Day and expressed gratitude to those who had served since the Great War and in subsequent conflicts. He highlighted concerns about homelessness among veterans and noted that an estimated 7,500 veterans were homeless in the UK, and stated that no veteran should be without housing, employment, or training opportunities.
- 9) Mr Hook addressed the significant challenges faced by the Council, including a budget crisis, a care crisis, and political instability. He expressed concern that, unlike previous years when a draft budget was published in November, there was currently no draft budget available and he invited the Leader to confirm when the draft budget would be published and to provide an indication of how the Administration intended to address the anticipated £80million reduction in revenue spending.
- 10) Whilst acknowledging Adult social care as the Council's most significant responsibility, Mr Hook expressed alarm at the removal of the Chair of the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee from her political group and her cabinet committee role. He urged the Leader to reinstate the Chair stressing that collaboration should take precedence over party politics. Mr Hook noted that Kent's over-65 population was projected to grow by almost 30% over the next decade, with the over-85 population increasing by 53%. He criticised past reductions in preventative services and called for imaginative, collegiate work on care.
- 11) Finally, Mr Hook commented on the Council's political situation, describing it as a crisis. He called for a leadership style that was professional and inclusive, urging councillors to model the behaviour expected of staff and avoid actions that damaged the Council's reputation. He concluded by emphasising the need for a serious and professional focus on the Council's responsibilities and opportunities to improve life for Kent residents.
- 12) Mr Hood, Leader of the Green Group, began by acknowledging the sacrifices made by those who had served in past conflicts. He commented on recent developments within the Reform Group including several

expulsions and expressed concern about the lack of clarity regarding the status of certain members. He highlighted the potential impact on the Kent and Medway Fire Authority, which may require new appointments to maintain stability.

- 13) Turning to transport, Mr Hood welcomed progress towards securing a new operator for cross-channel rail routes, with the possibility of future stops at Ashford and Ebbsfleet. He noted that Brexit-related checks had increased costs for passengers and expressed hope for improvements in international rail connectivity.
- 14) Mr Hood referred to the Energy Efficiency Plan, observing its similarity to the previous Climate Action Plan and criticised claims made by the Reform Group regarding savings from not purchasing electric vehicles. He expressed concern about the financial implications of maintaining County Hall and the missed opportunity to repurpose the building, warning that taxpayers would bear long-term costs. He also raised issues regarding street furniture, requesting the removal of flags to allow safe installation of Christmas lights.
- 15) Mr Hood reiterated the Green Group's support for measures to increase rail freight through the Channel Tunnel and for greater use of containerised freight via Thames Estuary ports, as a means to reduce lorry traffic on Kent's roads. Mr Hood said he opposed the Lower Thames Crossing, citing environmental concerns and the risk of worsening congestion, and suggested that future financial pressures on government may prevent the project from proceeding.
- 16) On Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Mr Hood stated that the Administration's preferred option was the greatest obstacle to genuine devolution and confirmed that the Green Group rejected Option 1A, arguing that it offered no guarantee of constitutional stability and failed to deliver the financial benefits associated with mayoral regions.
- 17) Mr Rayner responded to the Leader's Report by reviewing the first six months of the Reform Administration and said he considered the Administration to be experiencing significant difficulties as a result of self-inflicted issues. He criticised claims of savings made by the Administration, describing them as unsubstantiated or exaggerated. Mr Rayner emphasised the importance of Cabinet Members understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities effectively and promptly.
- 18) Mr Rayner raised further concerns regarding the suspension and expulsion of Reform Members, which had led to vacancies on KCC and external committees, creating confusion and disruption. He urged the Administration to improve its conduct and to ensure Members attended committees, prepared adequately, participated in debate, and responded to correspondence from electors.
- 19) Mr Rayner addressed reports regarding a proposed local freight tax, clarifying that such a measure fell under the jurisdiction of HM Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

- 20) Mr Brady, Leader of the Labour Group, echoed earlier remarks regarding remembrance and the importance of honouring armed forces and veterans. He indicated that he would address Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the Strategic Statement during the relevant agenda items later in the meeting.
- 21) On international rail services, Mr Brady stated that Labour had led efforts to restore services to Ashford and Ebbsfleet, including lobbying ministers, supporting competition on the Channel Tunnel route, and backing new operators such as Virgin to challenge Eurostar's monopoly. He criticised claims by the Reform Group that they were responsible for progress on cross-channel travel.
- 22) Turning to agriculture, Mr Brady rejected suggestions that government support was lacking, referring to examples such as the extension of the Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme, commitments to source 50% of public sector food from British farms, £110 million investment in agriculture, increased stewardship payments, and a 25-year roadmap for farming, amounting to £14.4billion in support for British agriculture.
- 23) On finance, Mr Brady criticised the Administration for cancelling meetings in its early months and failing to publish a draft budget. He highlighted concerns about the 2026–27 budget, noting that while £73.9million of additional government funding was expected, this was outweighed by £113million of additional spending, creating a significant deficit. He stated that the Administration appeared to be considering the use of reserves and had not provided clarity on council tax plans. He further noted that the settlement timetable remained unchanged and suggested that the Administration was behind schedule compared to previous years.
- 24) Mr Brady raised concerns about transparency and the lack of clear plans to address the financial gap. He concluded by stating that the Administration's approach risked negatively impacting Kent residents.
- 25) The Leader responded to comments made by the Group Leaders. She argued that the Conservative Party had failed to deliver on key promises, including Brexit, and criticised its record on national debt and immigration.
- 26) On international rail, the Leader asserted that Reform UK had played a leading role in bringing stakeholders together to progress plans for services at Ashford and Ebbsfleet.
- 27) She raised concerns about farming and inheritance tax changes due to take effect in April 2026, stating that these posed serious risks to family farms, food security, and mental health within the agricultural sector.
- 28) Ms Kemkaran commented on homelessness among veterans and linked housing shortages to immigration levels.
- 29) She reiterated that the Administration was awaiting the outcome of the Fair Funding Review before publishing a draft budget.

- 30) The Leader concluded by stating that Reform UK's success at the polls demonstrated public support for its approach.
- 31) A point of order was raised by Mr Hook regarding the Nolan Principles and the need to maintain respectful conduct during debate. The Chairman agreed and asked all members to uphold the Code of Conduct.
- 32) RESOLVED that the Leader's Report be noted.

30. Strategic Statement - Reforming Kent
(Item 8)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:

"County Council approves the Council Strategy, Reforming Kent 2025-28."
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1 to the vote and the voting was as follows.

For (53)

Mr J Baker, Mr B Black, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Ms B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Miss I Kemp, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mr M Logan, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Ms D Morton, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Ms B Porter, Ms S Roots, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Dr G Sturley, Mr D Taylor, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorpe, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr P Webb, Mr N Wibberley, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Against (21)

Mr B Barrett, Mr M Brice, Mr M Ellis, Mr S Heaver, Mr M Hood, Mr A Hook, Mr S Jeffery, Mr A Kennedy, Mr R Lehmann, Mr J Moreland, Mr M Munday, Mr T Prater, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Ricketts, Ms C Russell, Mr G Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr P Stepto, Mr R Streatfeild MBE, Mr M Sole and Mr N Williams

Abstain (3)

Mr A Brady, Mr R Ford and Mrs S Hudson

Motion carried.

- 3) RESOLVED that Council approves the Council Strategy, Reforming Kent 2025-28.

31. KCC's Strategic Business Case for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway

(Item 9)

- 1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that:

“County Council considers and debates the proposal as part of ensuring all-Member input to inform the proposed Cabinet Decision to approve and submit the Strategic Business Case to Government.”
- 2) RESOLVED to note the proposal as part of ensuring all-Member input to inform the proposed Cabinet Decision to approve and submit the Strategic Business Case to Government.

32. External Audit Annual Report

(Item 10)

Mr Paul Dossett (External Auditor) Grant Thornton was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Mr Brown proposed, and Mr Paul seconded the motion that:

“County Council notes the External Audit Annual Report 2024-25.”
- 2) Mr Paul Dossett, external auditor from Grant Thornton, provided an overview of the role of public sector auditors within local government, their duties, and statutory powers. Mr Dossett provided an overall perspective of the Council’s current position in relation to financial sustainability, governance, and value for money.
- 3) The Chairman thanked Mr Dossett, his team, and Council staff involved, for their hard work.
- 4) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote and it was agreed unanimously.
- 5) RESOLVED that County Council notes the External Audit Annual Report 2024-25.

33. Motions for Time Limited Debate

(Item 11)

- 1) Mr Streatfeild proposed, and Mr Hook seconded the motion that:

“County Council resolves to:
 - Recommend that KCC works with relevant partners to form an independently chaired cross party Health and Social Care Kent improvement board to urgently address issues in the CQC inspection, the budget, and the departure of the DASS.

- Recommend that the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care should write to the Secretary of State to:
 - o Confirm this Council's support of joint working at both local and national levels, including through the KCC Health and Wellbeing Board, to establish a long-term agreement on funding and provision of social care.
 - o Call for the establishment of a national cross-party commission dedicated to forging a long-term agreement on a predictable and consistent funding model for free personal care, ensuring sustainability and accessibility for all.
 - o Support the introduction of an Emergency Health and Care Budget ahead of the Autumn Statement, prioritising the resolution of the national crisis and placing it at the forefront of the new government's agenda."
- 2) Mr Ricketts declared an interest that he was an elected governor of East Kent University Hospitals Foundation Trust.
- 3) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 1 to the vote and the voting was as follows:

For (22)

Mr B Barrett, Mr M Brice, Mrs T Dean MBE, Mr M Ellis, Mr R Ford, Mr S Heaven, Mr M Hood, Mr A Hook, Mr S Jeffery, Miss I Kemp, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J Moreland, Mr M Munday, Mr T Prater, Mr A Ricketts, Ms C Russell, Mr G Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr P Stepto, Mr R Streatfeild MBE, Mr M Sole and Mr N Williams

Against (47)

Mr J Baker, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Ms B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Ms D Morton, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Ms B Porter, Ms S Roots, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Dr G Sturley, Mr D Taylor, Mr A Thorpe, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr P Webb, Mr N Wibberley, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Abstain (5)

Mr B Black, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr A Brady, Mrs S Hudson and Mr P Thomas

Motion lost.

4) Mr Stepto proposed, and Mr Hood seconded the motion that:

“This Council resolves to

1. Recommend that all future financial transactions/decisions in relation to Treasury Management which are above the value of £2 million are reported to the Governance & Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.
2. Recommend that all Member groups or boards responsible for monitoring and oversight of Treasury Management activity (e.g. the Treasury Management Group) are formalised within KCC governance with a requirement to include representation from all Political Groups.”

5) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion in paragraph 4 to the vote and the voting was as follows:

For (25)

Mr B Barrett, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mrs T Dean MBE, Mr M Ellis, Mr R Ford, Mr S Heaven, Mr M Hood, Mr A Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr S Jeffery, Miss I Kemp, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J Moreland, Mr M Munday, Mr T Prater, Mr A Ricketts, Ms C Russell, Mr G Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr P Stepto, Mr R Streatfeild MBE, Mr M Sole and Mr D Taylor

Against (44)

Mr J Baker, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Ms B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Ms L Kemkaran, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Ms D Morton, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Ms B Porter, Ms S Roots, Mr T Shonk, Mr D Sian, Dr G Sturley, Mr A Thorpe, Mr D Truder, Mr R Waters, Mr P Webb, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

Abstain (3)

Mr B Black, Mr P Thomas and Mr N Wibberley

Motion lost.