

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### **GROWTH, ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 13 January 2026.

PRESENT: Mr James Defriend (Chair), Mr Thomas Mallon (Vice-Chair), Mr Alister Brady, Mr Tim Prater, Mr Paul Thomas, Mr Ryan Waters, Mr Martin Paul, Mrs Beverley Porter, Mr Dodger Sian, Mr Terry Mole (Substitute), Mr Ben Fryer, Mr Mark Hood and Mrs Sarah Hudson.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Brian Collins ( Deputy Leader of the Council), Mr Paul Webb ( Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) , Mr Paul King ( Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects) , Mr David Wimble (Virtually Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects) , Mr Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) , Mr Spencer Dixon (Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) , Mr Jamie Henderson (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Coastal Regeneration) and Mrs Mary Lawes ( Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Simon Jones ( Virtually Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport), Mrs Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Mr Steve Samson (Head of Economy), Mr Tom Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place), Mr Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport) , Mr Matthew Smyth ( Director of Environment and Waste) , Mr Shane Bushell ( Head of Service for Public Transport) , Mr Matthew Wagner (Chief Analyst), Mr Ben Hudson (Energy and Adaptations Manager) Mrs Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure) Mr Dave Shipton (Head of Financial Strategy) Mr Kevin Tilson (Finance Business Partner ) Mr Robin Hadley (Soft Landscape Asset Manager) Mrs Sarah Nurden (Strategic Programme Manager) Mr Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager for Infrastructure) Mrs Pauline Harmer (Senior Highways Manager) Mrs Victora Soames (Senior Project Manager) Mr Hugh D'Alton (Strategic Programme Manager) Mrs Helen Shulver (Assistant Director Resource Management and Circular Economy) Mr Steve Pay (Planning and Operations Manager) Mr Joseph Ratcliffe (Transport Strategy Manager) Mr Tim Read (Head of Transportation) Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries and ,Registration and Archives) and Mr J Willis (Democratic Service Officer)

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

#### **46. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 2)*

1. Mr Thorp sent apologies. Mr Mole was the allocated substitute.

a) The Clerk highlighted the changes in the Membership in accordance with paragraph 6.5 of the constitution as detailed in section 18 (public arrangements). Overall membership would now see a reduction from 17 Members to 13 Members.

b) Mr Prater expressed concern regarding the revised figures and the consequent effect on Members' ability to undertake effective scrutiny of the decision presented to them. He requested that the Leader reconsider the decision in light of these issues. The Chair acknowledged the concerns raised and advised that he would refer the matter to the Leader of the Council for further consideration.

#### **47. Declarations of Interest**

*(Item 3)*

No declarations of interest were received.

#### **48. Minutes of the meetings held on 04/11/2025 (Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee) and 11/11/2025 (Growth, Economic Development & Communities Cabinet Committee)**

*(Item 4)*

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held 04/11/2024 of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee and on the 11/11/2025 Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

#### **49. Verbal Update by Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors**

*(Item 5)*

*Paul Webb (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Paul King (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects), David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) Provided an update on the Following:*

1. Mr Osborne, delivered his verbal update, recent events encompassed:

- a) Updated on the continued salt gritting of Kents roads, in addition to the road's drainage teams clearing of 65,000 gullies since April 2025. In addition, 35,000 pot holes had been filled.
- b) A provisional grant of £48 million capital and £42 million revenue from the DfT (Department for Transport) had been received and would aid in the continued improvements of Kents bus networks, additionally a multiyear funding settlement for walking and cycling of £1.6 million revenue, and £ 5.2 million capital for 2026-27 was also discussed.
- c) The Highways long term maintenance contract with partners Ringway would commence in May. The contract was valued at £50 million per year, and repairs would be expected to be completed at a faster rate than previously recorded. £30 million had been invested in the road resurfacing programme, and a capital highway's maintenance grant of £56 million was being received this year (2026-

27). In addition, a further £274 million pounds was to be invested into the network over the next four years.

- d) Additional investments to pre-school road safety training would look to reach over 4,000 children and older drivers throughout Kent. The discussion was summarised with the announcement that Kent Highways had been nominated for a national award for most improved performance.

2. Mr King, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special projects gave his first update of the new collated portfolio:

- a) Thanked KCC officers for the swift response observed during the recent water outages that had impacted Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas. Mr King further outlined how the new revised portfolio would aim to drive economic revitalization, stimulate investment and job creation within Kent's coastal areas. The Cabinet Member looked forward to future collaborative work that will benefit the people of Kent.
- b) Highlighted KCC's £93 million annual spend on waste disposal that had seen around 660,000 tonnes of material pass through household waste recycling centres and transfer stations.
- c) The Cabinet Member highlighted the opportunities being explored to improve enhanced recycling outcomes in the discussed areas by improving better economical benefits through resource efficiency and costs savings.

3. Mr Webb, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services updated Members on his respective portfolio:

- a) The Committee acknowledged an update on the high level of activity experienced by the Trading Standards team over the festive period. It was reported that a new TikTok channel had been launched, aimed at informing the public of the significant hazards associated with counterfeit goods and provided guidance on the key indicators to consider when purchasing items to ensure that they were genuine and safe.
- b) The same team were also heavily involved with the BBC's Scam Safe week initiatives and had attended a road show at Ditton community Centre, offering further advice and information to the general public.
- c) Trading Standards prosecutions had seen three fraudsters convicted for crimes related to solar energy sales.
- d) Dartford Borough Council Environmental Health team had been working in partnership with colleagues from KCC's Trading Standards team to offer formal advice to business under the statutory and primary authority scheme.
- e) The Committee was advised that the Trading Standards team had achieved significant success in intercepting and seizing illegal vapes that had entered via Kent's ports.

- f) Two Trading Standards apprenticeship positions had been secured through government funding to support the continuation of the team's robust enforcement activity.
- g) Kent Scientific services continued to provide food and feed testing and would be currently supporting the National Food Crime Unit.
- h) Library and registration services had also observed a busy festive period.
- i) Community Wardens had continued to support the community, notably those impacted by the local water outages seen in the across the County.
- j) The sale of Polhill gypsy and Romany traveller site was set to conclude by the end of January and would bring in a small capital receipt. The John Downton Awards celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> and final year with 453 entries across 36 schools having been submitted. This included six SEN schools. The panel was to be chaired by Carrie Wallace. All submitted artworks would be showcased online with the awards ceremony occurring at County Hall in mid-February.
- k) The Cabinet Member shared the positive news of the recent opening of Dover's Discovery Centre, which includes Library, Adult Education, Family Services, Good Day Programme and Dover District Museum. Kent libraries and Education would be joining forces to promote reading for all ages, as part of the National Year of reading 2026. This is a national approach due to national data that shows a countrywide decrease in literacy rates and people reading. Library co-location projects in January will see the completion of works and re-opening of Temple Hill and Cranbrook Libraries which will see co-location with Family Hubs. Further works in Sittingbourne are in progress and, Queensborough and Cliftonville libraries will see works start soon with target completion during the first quarter of 2026.
- l) The Senior Coroner welcomed the High Sheriff of Kent to Oakwood House in Maidstone to observe the facilities dedicated to the coronial judicial functions in Kent and Medway.

4. Mr Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects provided an update on the following:

- a) Mr Wimble discussed aspects of his new role as Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects. Mr Wimble thanked officers for their support in his previous Cabinet role.
- b) Following the successful event that KCC organised in September last year, last week the Cabinet Member had attended an event marking the 30th anniversary of international rail services starting in Ashford. Ashford Borough Council organised the event which had again brought together local authorities, partners and stakeholders along with local businesses and potential train operators to keep up the momentum about the urgent need to see international rail services return to Kent.. The inaugural meeting of the Kent stations working group took place in December and would continue to make the business case and public interest case for the reinstatement of stopping services in Ashford and Ebbsfleet.

- c) The Cabinet Member discussed Brand Kent's desire to create a joint vision for investment and tourism to market Kent as a place to live, work and visit. Following the liquidation of Visit Kent and Locate in Kent in September last year, a small in-house team had been recruited to KCC to drive forward the county's visitor economy and attract inward investment. While the team has only been in place for a few weeks, they have hit the ground running and are currently working with local industry partners to ensure the service meets the needs of local visitor economy businesses and continues to promote opportunities for the private sector to invest in the county.
- d) An update on skills boot camps was provided which discussed the 220 learners that had now commenced and had been in attendance of the bootcamp course since the launch in July. 62 people had now fully completed a course. 24 attendees had already secured a job as a direct result of a guaranteed job interview at the end of their course. Courses cover construction, social care and creative industries including 2 courses run with the Lower Thames crossing at the new skills hub in Gravesend. The Department for Education (DfE) had also shown support, and it was anticipated that a funding allocation of £1.5m for the programme to continue in 2026-27 would be received.
- e) Strategic health work had continued with the implementation of the Get Kent & Medway Working plan, which was among the first of 5 plans published of the 41 nationally. KCC, Medway Council, the NHS and Job centre plus had been turning this plan and the 'Kent & Medway Work & Health strategy' into activities and current work would focus on the provision of clear online resources to support local employers and businesses, provide toolkits for stakeholders to summarise the health, work and skills landscape and working to co-locate employment support in health settings.
- f) Over 500 people had now signed up to receive support from the Connect to Work programme which helped disadvantaged people into work through a supported employment model that provided up to 12 months support. 55 people had commenced work and reported first earnings. It was expected that the overall figure would rise significantly in the coming months.
- g) The Committee received an update on the Special Projects portfolio, with particular reference to three priority initiatives. The Cabinet Members discussed ongoing energy-related projects, including exploration of a new nuclear option for Dungeness power station, as well as the development of a clear strategic vision for solar energy in Kent, that would encompass both rooftop solar installations and the utilisation of suitable brownfield sites.
- h) The final special projects item discussed would be the introduction of an environmental tax on lorries entering the UK. The scheme would be similar to the Swiss environment model and look to target lorries entering Kent via the port of Dover. How the tax was collected and invested were to be discussed further once the model had been fully explored.

5. In response to comments and questions from Members, the discussion covered the following:

- a) Members asked for reassurances on the provision of the latest and most popular published works for the community and raised if a reduction in the budget for buying books was to occur. Members further queried on the matter of the installation of solar panels on buildings and what mechanisms would be in place to ensure that this occurred. Finally, Members asked on how the environmental tax could be implemented, how the tax would benefit the Council and if central government, who governed the national highways would implement this with an internal border and aid in the mitigation of large delays on the roads.
- b) Mr Wimble responded to the concerns raised by Members on how his updated special projects could be delivered. Mr Wimble would be looking to update at the upcoming Cabinet Committee and expand further on all future projects' trajectories.
- c) Members asked for clarification on the funding that had been received from central government, Mr Osborne responded that £48 million capital had been secured for bus support, with £42 million revenues on buses. Highways were £30 million in 2025. Current year had seen an award of £56 million and over the next four years an investment of £274 million would be targeted.
- d) Concerns were raised on the role and previous cuts to Community Wardens. The respective Cabinet Member responded that the previous administration had reduced wardens in half (from 70 to 35). Recent Parish Council funding had allowed for the recruitment of two new wardens with the current administration looking to expand further.
- e) Clarification on how the percentage of population in an area impacted on the availability of Community Wardens were discussed. Mr Webb acknowledged there was likely a need to review the proportion of population to warden's ratio. Mrs Holt-Castle referenced the geographical allocation policy agreed by a previous committee and suggested this could be encompassed as part of a paper on Wardens' activity within each borough already on forward plan of the Cabinet Committee.
- f) A Member discussed the ongoing issues impacting flooding in the Albert Reed Gardens in Maidstone., whilst the Member thanked the Cabinet Member for their response to flooding there was a desire to have a further discussion on the obstructed sight lines that had been reported to KCC previously and where current responsibilities lay. Mr Osborne acknowledged the issue and was happy to meet with the Member to discuss further.
- g) It was queried if the family hub would be available immediately at the Temple Hill library after it reopens on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. Mr Webb acknowledged the request and would seek to update the Member once more details on the family hub reopening were known. Members asked if the locations discussed in Kent would be limited to just Libraries/family hubs. Mr Webb discussed that locations would be reviewed to determine what additional activities could take place, additional locations in KCC portfolios would also be reviewed to see how delivery for activities could be coordinated.

- h) Members praised Mr Osborne's response to the storm events that had impacted in early January the Folkestone and surrounding coastal communities. Whilst some clean-up operations were still ongoing, Members noted that the overall response from KCC and its partners had been excellent.
- i) It was requested that recirculated papers would include a clear summary of the Community Wardens key activities, roles, responsibilities, and demonstrable outcomes be provided to Members. Capturing current work would support both the case for maintaining current staffing levels and any future proposals to increase them. Documentation would provide useful evidence for similar initiatives when preparing business cases or funding justifications in the future.

**RESOLVED** to note the Verbal Updates

## **50. Final Draft Budget**

*(Item 6)*

*Paul Webb (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Paul King (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Special Projects), David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) with support from Dave Shipton (Head of Financial Strategy) and Kevin Tilson (Finance Business Partner, Growth, Environment and Transport)*

1. Dave Shipton updated the Cabinet Committee on the following aspects of the GET Draft budget:

- a) The draft budget balances a significant increase spend of £179.5 Million and had signified an 11.7% in spending. The figure also balanced the reversal of £28 million of savings seen from previous years. Spending pressures were partly offset by the impact of net changes in reserves of £14.7 Million and £ 61.7 million of new and full year effect savings plans and £14.6million of income generation.
- b) Mr Shipton added that once the discussed elements were considered, there was a net increase of spending of £ 116.5 Million (up 7.6%). Net increase was funded by a combination of funds from central government and local government. Capital programme also included a near £500 million increase over the 10-year period but would be entirely funded from external source or from within already approved borrowing in the existing capital programme. No new borrowing was raised.
- c) The majority of the capital programme was directed towards investment in school buildings, highways asset management, and the maintenance and improvement of other council-owned facilities. Mr Shipton highlighted the £21.7 million increases related to the Growth, Environment and Transport portfolios.
- d) Highlighted the key components that Members needed to be aware of when setting a budget such as local government finance settlement and Council tax arrangements.

- e) Officers urged caution in understating the risk captured within the draft budget. Aspects such as the significant pressures seen in areas such as Adult Social Care (£90 million) and Children's Social Care (£50 million) provisions, whilst not part of the discussed portfolio, the discussed functions still impacted the wider budget as a whole. Deterioration to GETs asset stock was flagged as a significant risk to the GET portfolio. Mr Collins praised the work Mr Shipton and colleagues had completed in delivering the draft budget.

2) In response to the presented Draft Budget, Members asked the following:

- a) Members discussed the highlighted spending growth pressure but queried if the provision of future increase of waste tonnage (984,0000) was correct as building targets had stagnated. Mr Tilson responded that the provision was included in the budget for demographic-driven increases in waste tonnages and was based on modelling linked to new housebuilding. The discussed assumptions were reviewed annually, with budgets adjusted for any under- or over-delivery. For 2026–27, slower-than-expected housing growth had resulted in the removal of approximately 5,000 tonnes from the forecast. This had ensured the medium-term plan reflected expected tonnage changes alongside evolving recycling targets.
- b) The £660,000 on street car parking was raised by Members who specifically queried on how the County Council would recoup this cost and enforce the issue further into the future throughout the County. Mr Osborne responded that since publication a number of funds had been recovered from district partners with discussion continuing. Simon Jones further confirmed that a wider conversation with Districts and Boroughs was underway to target a collaborative approach that would make the service more efficient in the future.
- c) The Kent Travel saver was discussed and Members asked if any increases in cost were to be observed going forward. Mr Bushell responded that considerations for reviewing the Kent Travel saver would be undertaken with officers exploring the wider issues and implications throughout KCC. Officers would bring further information on the initiative back to the Committee at a later date.
- d) Clarity on the library's material fund was sought as the reported direction of spend and future spends remained unclear. Mr Pearson confirmed that the materials fund covered all forms of book material. There had been a small one-off reduction to the materials fund, but this was to be offset by the use of Section 106 developer contributions. Mr Pearson also confirmed there was despite that still a healthy materials fund of over £900,000 to cover books and supporting resources and confirmed that new popular bestsellers would be covered as part of KCC's new stock buying.
- e) Members questioned the awaiting confirmation (Section 2.6.6) of the Bus Services Improvements Plan (BSIP grant). Mr Bushell confirmed that the item would be presented back to the committee for discussion once the funding proposal had been received in March.

- f) Questions on exploring the property portfolio as an alternative funding stream from potential assets were mooted. Members noted that the budget appeared to be constrained and potentially be easily impacted by unforeseen events.
- g) Mr Shipton responded that discussions on income from KCC's properties lay likely within the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee scope. Mr Shipton further expanded upon the Section 25 assurance statement, elements of risk that impacted and the overall robustness of estimates that are calculated to alleviate concerns. An independent statement would be given by the Chief Finance Officer at full Council for wider discussions and considerations.
- h) Members asked for further clarity on the option of an increased premium paid by parents to the Kent travel Scheme. Members were concerned on the figures produced for the Highways Investment Budget and the perceived size of increase on the associated budget. Officers explained the role of capital grants and their application to the totals in detail. It was suggested that once the full budget was approved further investigations would take place. Members suggested a Direct Debit option to spread the cost be applied.
- i) It was outlined that pavements and highways would require an additional £110 million a year to maintain. Members discussed the declining state of both assets and queried on what could be done to close the budget gaps and improve both assets. The respective Cabinet Member responded that once the full Department for Transport (DfT) budgets were in place and realised, actions to address this would then commence.
- j) Concerns were raised on the potential removal of documentation from the KCC archive pages and if this was potentially part of a wider cost cutting scheme. Mr Ratcliffe suggested that budgetary cuts had not been responsible for documentation being made unavailable. The officer would look to investigate further.
- k) Clarification on the Medium-term financial plan (MTFP) viability of being balanced over three years were flagged. Mr Shipton responded that the position had been compared against the government's multi-year settlement, which had left a remaining gap to be addressed.
- l) While the requirement to set a balanced budget had applied only to the forthcoming financial year, good practice required a consideration of the medium-term outlook when balancing the 2026–27 budget. It was deemed acceptable for the medium-term plan to show a gap, provided it was clear that this would need to be closed through further savings, income generation, cost-avoidance measures, or future council tax decisions. The plan was illustrative, as was stated at the outset.
- m) The savings incorporated into the budget from recycling were based on the additional work currently being undertaken with District and Borough Councils, particularly in relation to food-waste collection. Several authorities had recorded significant increases in food-waste capture notably up to 25% in some areas. As a result of this work there was an achieved saving of approximately £600,000.

- n) Further initiatives were underway to improve recycling performance in flatted properties and to reduce contamination which had also carried a cost within the recycling budget. Through the Kent Resource Partnership which had brought together all 13 Kent authorities, Officers were exploring initiatives and opportunities on a borough-by-borough basis to support improved local recycling performance and deliver additional efficiencies.
- o) Members referenced a past paper that had previously been presented and had indicated an assumed £16 million cost by 2028 which related to future waste-management requirements. At the same time, the current budget had included a proposed saving of £1.75 million, based on anticipated reductions in emissions arising from higher recycling rates. Members agreed that the saving line was clear but noted that trying to identify the section of the budget where the corresponding future £16 million requirement referred to in the earlier paper, had been reflected or costed.
- p) The Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) impact falls in Quarter 4 of Year 3 of the MTFP. At current stage it had been budgeted for one quarter of the potential risk in 2027–28, with the full financial impact expected to materialise in the year immediately following the current MTFP period.
- q) Focus had been on increased recycling levels and reducing the exposure that the function could face when the scheme takes effect. Current work was ongoing and would continue throughout next year. Officers would then be in a position to set out the revised level of risk or liability in Year 3 of the next MTFP and would be brought forward when Cabinet meets again at this time next year.
- r) Members queried the included £400,000 reduction in staffing cost that had equated to a 1% saving. The papers had stated that this reflected a 1% allocation against the GET net staffing budget, with each director required to review their service structures, examine vacant posts for potential deletion, and consider existing vacancy-management targets and capacity. Members asked how many staff posts did the £400,000 reduction represent.
- s) Officers responded that operational staff would always be replaced. When a member of staff left through natural attrition, the post would be reviewed to determine whether it needed to be re-filled. Officers suggested that this was the extent of the commitment at this stage.
- t) Concerns were raised on the potential increased cost of the Kent Travel Scheme, and the risks associated with the income generated from car parks. Efficiency savings to libraries were highlighted by the Cabinet Member (Auto terminals) as an already successfully implemented cost measure. Similar initiatives were also underway.

**RESOLVED** to note the Draft Budget

## 51. Performance Dashboard

(Item 7)

*Matt Wagner, (Chief Analyst); and Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth, Environment & Transport) were in attendance for this item*

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report. The report covered the periods of September to October 2025. The performance dashboard was the first combined view of the two preceding Cabinet Committees.

- a) 38 of 44 KPIs included within the report were RAG (Red, Amber and Green) rated Green, it was noted that there was five RAG rated amber.
- b) The solitary red KPI represented *'Emergency incidents attended to within 2 hours'* The discussed red KPI had seen a decrease due to the impact of storm Benjamin that had occurred in October and subsequent impacts on the ability to resource and respond in a timely manner. The service had held and would continue to hold regular meetings with contractors at an area level to discuss areas of concern and lessons learned to aid in the improvement of the KPI.
- c) The five amber KPI captured *'Percentage of priority 1 food, feed and consumer products sample tests reported to clients within 5 working days'* (Community Protection) , *'Percentage of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) faults reported online'* (Strategic Development and Place) , *'Enquiries requiring a response, responded to within 28 days including completed in 28 days'* , *'Percentage of highway enquiries reported through the online fault reporting tool Highways'* ( Highways and Transport) and *'Municipal waste recycled and composted'* ( Environment and Circular economy)
- d) Overall green KPIs had represented 86% of the overall picture and indicated a solid on or ahead of target trajectory, five rated amber and one rated red closed out the reporting periods overall picture.

2) In response to comments and questions from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:

- a) Members noted the changes to HT02 from *'Faults reported by the public completed in 28 days'* to *'All inquiries requiring a response to within 28 days.'*
- b) Mr Loosemore explained that the previous descriptor had not provided a true representation of what the KPI reflected and that the new wording would give a more accurate representation.
- c) HT08 capturing *'emergency response within two hours'*, Members raised concerns on the Council's capacity to deal with emergency Incidents, Officers raised that the failure of this KPI was due to the capacity issues impacted by recent storm events. Officers further discussed how resources would be allocated on prioritised events.
- d) A decline in DT01 *'Percentage of highways inquiries reported through the online tool'* from green to amber was noted. Further investigation was required to understand the small decline seen in the KPI.

- e) Officers explained to Members the rationale of the removal of a number of KPIs associated with household recycling centres and wood converted to biomass. The removal had been seen as a way to not reward the use of waste energy in a bid to reduce the Councils' overall emissions and retained a focus on increasing recycling and reuse targets.
- f) Members asked for further updates on why KPIs associated with volunteer hours had been lowered. Officers would look to provide further expanded rationale outside the meeting once checked

**RESOLVED** to note the Performance Dashboard.

## **52. Gravesend - Tilbury Ferry Petition Update** (Item 8)

*Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport), Shane Bushell (Client Transport Manager) and Steve Pay (Public Transport Planning and Operations Manager) were in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Osborne presented the following aspects of the update:

- a) The Gravesend-Tilbury ferry service had ceased operations in April 2024 following Thurrock Council's withdrawal of its funding contribution. Kent County Council had subsequently provided temporary sole funding to ensure that passengers received appropriate notice of the closure. At present, no budget provision existed to reinstate the service.
- b) Any future re-establishment would require the identification of new funding sources. Kent County Council continued to support the Thames Estuary Growth Board, which was leading work to assess options for restoring the ferry, either as a commercially viable service or through a suitable partnership-funding arrangement.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:

- a) It was confirmed that there had not been any signs of support received from the Thames Estuary Group on the reintroduction of the ferry crossing. It was suggested that the level of funding required to reinstate the crossing would likely to be beyond the reach of one singular organisation and even if reinstated would likely require a significant subsidy to continue to be viable.
- b) The Cabinet Member expanded upon the exploration of alternative funding sources, whether through collaboration within the group or from external partners. Options included examining potential Thames Crossing-related revenues and opportunities arising from future local development. Mr Osborne

urged caution and suggested that at this stage no assurance about when or whether the ferry service would be reinstated could be made.

- c) Members raised Thurrock Councils current local plan consultation and suggested the Kent County Council look to submit a response and cooperate in any potential future negotiations.
- d) It was determined the Thames Estuary Growth Board had now disbanded (Late December 2025) due to a lack of public funding. Members highlighted that the discussion brought to Committee specifically had targeted the discussions between KCC and the TEGB.
- e) It was suggested that the paper presented be withdrawn, updated and brought back at the next meeting of the Cabinet Committee. In addition, Members discussed that the presented report did not capture the concerns raised from the initial petition.
- f) Members also asked that when the report returns a concise capital costing of costs of return to service, ferry acquisition and other budgetary constraints that may require partnered support be captured.
- g) The Chair agreed that the item would return with a corrected and updated revised report at the next available opportunity.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report

### **53. Highway Verge Improvements for Biodiversity-Report** (Item 9)

*Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport) and Robin Hadley (Asset Manager) were in attendance for this item*

1. Officers briefed Members on the associated report and requested any feedback from Members, aspects captured included:

- a) Concerns were raised on the accidental destruction of a number of orchids on Bluebell Hill by contractors, Members suggested some improved signage be implemented to prevent similar incidents occurring. Officers acknowledged concerns but did raise that due to the difficult locations of sites that signage may be difficult to implement and conversely there was a desire to not advertise the location of sensitive areas to the wider public.
- b) The Vice-Chair raised the discussion of foliage growth upon roundabouts (Ebbsfleet locale) and how this could potentially be a health and safety issue for road users. Officers acknowledged the concerns and highlighted the targeted wildflower installation in conjunction with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation once underway, would be assessed on safety grounds.

- c) In relation to Swanscombe and Greenhithe, a significant portion of the area was designated as a Site of Special Interest (SSI), with the remainder falling within the development corridor (Swanscombe Heritage Park). Members asked how collaboration could be strengthened between KCC and Swanscombe Council to support visitors.
- d) Mr Hadley acknowledged the request and discussed the current involvement of activities; a communication plan could be rolled out to talk to locals and asked for Members involvement in the initiative.
- e) Members sought assurances that Members of the committee would be involved with the Plan Bee initiative. The Cabinet Member for Environment and officers confirmed that this was agreeable.
- f) Officers confirmed the process for dealing with invasive plant species such as giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed. New build verge improvements were also a concern raised by Members.
- g) In terms of local planning applications, KCC had provided an ecological advisory service to every planning authority in the county. Biodiversity officers would review applications and advise on the ecological considerations of any proposed schemes.
- h) KCC had published the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy in November. This had set out KCC's strategic priorities for nature recovery and had provided a spatial framework that included a mapping tool that planning authorities could use to inform their local plans. This would help guide decisions on land use, site allocations, and the delivery of ecological outcomes across the county.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report

#### **54. Energy and Low Emissions Strategy (ELES) Amendments-Report** (Item 10)

*Jamie Henderson (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Coastal Regeneration) and Ben Hudson (Energy and Climate Change Manager) were in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Hudson presented the item and discussed the following aspects to Members

- a) The Energy and Low Emission Strategy (E-LES) was adopted in 2020 by a wide range of public-sector partners, including all 14 local authorities, the NHS, the Kent Chamber of Commerce and the Kent Housing Group. It offered a comprehensive strategy that sets out how Kent would meet national targets and policies whilst supporting the transition to a clean and resilient economy. The strategy would be delivered through a partnership approach and was overseen by the Kent and Medway Environment Group.

- b) The process of updating the implementation plan began in February last year and included consultation with all Kent and Medway partners and had encompassed Districts, Boroughs, and the KCC Environment Board. The revised plan had deliberately focused on priorities that were impactful, achievable, and relevant, and reflected the evolving policy and funding considerations across all 14 partner organisations and not solely KCC.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report

**55. KMEF-Ambition 1-Enable Innovative, Productive and Creative Businesses-Report**  
*(Item 11)*

*Jamie Henderson (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Coastal Regeneration) Steve Samson (Head of Economy) and Sarah Nurden (Strategic Programme Manager - KMEP) were in attendance for this item.*

1.Mr Samson presented the item with background aspects presented to the Members

- a) The Kent and Medway Economic Framework was a jointly developed strategic document agreed in March 2024. It had been produced through collaboration between all local authorities in the County, the private sector and business community through the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), other key organisations included universities and further education colleges. It reflected a shared commitment across key partners to support and guide economic development in Kent and Medway.
- b) The report outlined the five ambitions within Kent and Medway which had encompassed: supporting businesses and encouraging innovation, improving skills and employment, supporting infrastructure for growth, and economic opportunity for all communities and promoting Kent and Medway as places to invest, visit and conduct business.
- c) Officers provided a further update on activities under the economic strategy. It was recognised that the strategy was not a funded programme in itself, but rather a framework through which partners across Kent and Medway work collaboratively to secure external investment and deliver shared priorities. The Council would continue to work with a range of organisations to identify and pursue funding opportunities to support delivery.
- d) It was reported that the ongoing collaboration with universities and other regional partners was underway to prepare a joint bid to central government that would aim to secure funding to support the development and growth of innovation clusters. The update formed part of the Committee's regular monitoring of progress against the strategy's ambitions and action areas.

- e) Reference was made to the Kent and Medway Business Fund. The loan scheme was administered by Kent County Council and provided loan financing to small businesses across the County to support business growth and aid in job creation.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members, discussion covered the following:

- a) Members asked how aspects were measured specifically those aspects that have been successful. Officers acknowledged how broad the framework was and as an example discussed how a focus on business support could be measured through the Kent and Medway growth hub service to capture the number of businesses that had received support.
- b) Officers emphasised the importance of clearly demonstrating the impact of the strategy's work, particularly in relation to measurable outcomes such as employment creation. The Member commented that, as an example, an ambition was to see 300 people employed through a particular policy or programme, reporting should enable Members to understand if progress had remained on track.
- c) Members discussed the recent closure of Visit Kent and how the current 'Brand Kent' sat within the overall picture of Kent tourism frameworks. Officers responded that the tourism body of work discussed had now been brought in-house under the new Grow in Kent banner.
- d) The team's activities had included improving the number of businesses attracted to the County and the development of a pipeline of interested companies that could align with objective one of the economic frameworks. Performance in the discussed areas would be monitored accordingly. Similarly, the Visit Kent data that related to visitor economy metrics and business engagement was to be captured under ambition five of the framework.
- e) Members queried if supporting material could be provided to Members for when they were engaged in the wider communities. This would aid local business to be better informed of what opportunities were available to potential applicants. Officers highlighted the use the Connect to work, Growth Hub, Skills Bootcamps and the Visitor Economy Service as options to be considered.
- f) Officers confirmed that the Economy Team would aim to make a summary available to all Members. The team had engaged with businesses and partners and had ensured that the related information was readily available. This had allowed the team to discuss innovation with businesses and aid in highlighting related areas such as skills or workforce challenges. Having the information to hand had ensured that everyone would be aware of the full range of support and opportunities available collectively.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report

## **56. Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) - Report** *(Item 12)*

*Jamie Henderson (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Coastal Regeneration) Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager for Infrastructure (GET)) was in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Finch presented the item by highlighting that:

- a) KCC had a statutory obligation to produce an Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). The statement would set out the financial transactions related to developer contributions, specifically detailing the amounts secured, received, and spent during the preceding financial year.
- b) The report was structured around three principal categories of developer contributions. The most significant of these was Section 106 contributions. As shown in Table 1 at paragraph 2.5, the report provided a breakdown of the funding secured, received, and spent across each KCC service area.
- c) For 2024/25, the total amount secured for KCC services through developer contributions was £31.7 million. The amount received in-year was £23.4 million and represented funding that was now being fully banked from developments that were currently progressed and becoming occupied. In total, £17 million had been invested by KCC into infrastructure to support and enable the growth of new and expanding communities.
- d) Officers also discussed the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). There were five CIL-charging authorities in the County, but only one, Folkestone & Hythe District Council provided KCC with a regular and predictable stream of CIL income. KCC received 35% of their annual CIL revenue, and in the reporting period this amounted to £547,000. All of the funding had now been allocated, through policy decisions, to support the delivery of the new waste transfer station required to serve the district.
- e) Developer contributions were also secured and delivered through Section 278 agreements. These relate to highway improvements that developers undertake directly on the public highway network. The value of these works was demonstrated through financial bonds attached to each Section 278 agreement. The bonds reflected the cost of the infrastructure being delivered by the developer. During the reporting year, the total value of bonds secured had amounted to £12.7 million.
- f) The future spending and priorities balance had increased from £119 million to £126 million over the financial year. It was not unusual for funding to be held at this level, as a number of major infrastructure requirements associated with growth carried significant costs. Notably, substantial allocations were being retained for the Sturry Link Road (£6.8 million) and for the expansion of Chilmington Green Secondary School, alongside several other projects detailed within the report.
- g) Officers added that while the IFS was a useful tool for setting out what had been secured, it was important to recognise that secured contributions represented only a snapshot in time. Actual delivery and spending profiles would inevitably

evolve as developments progressed, and infrastructure programmes moved forward.

- h) On average, over the past five years, KCC had received £33.4 million per year in developer contributions and represented a significant and ongoing contribution to KCC's overall budget. Officers raised that a series of district-level meetings involving district and county members had taken place. These sessions were designed to set out the scale of growth taking place in each area and highlighted any local issues arising from that growth and explained the associated infrastructure that would be required to support it.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members, discussion covered the following:

- a) Developer contributions for Dartford were noted to be the lowest in the County, however Dartford itself had seen a significant population increase. Members raised concerns that the existing infrastructure present would struggle under such pressures as population growth and demand.
- b) Officers clarified how contributions were secured and encapsulated in the policy of the developer contributions guide. It was further accentuated that Dartford was a Community Infrastructure Levy authority, and this had impacted the amount of influence the County Council had on securing developer contributions.
- c) The level of developer contributions could be impacted due to financial viability issues of a proposed development. Many of these cases had arisen on brownfield sites, where developers had been permitted to submit a viability appraisal. Such appraisals could demonstrate that making the full contribution request would make the scheme unviable.
- d) National legislation relating to viability allows developers to retain a profit margin of 15–20% which could result in the County not securing all of the mitigation it had requested.
- e) In relation to the £126 million of unspent Section 106 contributions, Members queried if funds were received and held by KCC and if invested, what the level of return was being generated from the investment and if inflationary pressures had been factored into Section 106 contributions.
- f) In response officers addressed how inflation was captured through Section 106 agreements. In instances where KCC are a direct party to the agreement and where work jointly took place with the district, KCC ensured that indexation was applied within the S106 legal agreement.
- g) The charges set out in the Developer Contributions Guide were based on a cost position as of Quarter 1, 2022. Indexation was then applied from that baseline date up to the date the contribution was actually paid. The mechanism would be secured through the legal agreement linked to the relevant planning application.
- h) Once funding had been received it would be placed into an interest-bearing account. Most S106 agreements specify that contributions must be held in such

an account. The detailed arrangements for how interest was applied and accounted for would sit with finance colleagues. Officers highlighted that it was the understanding that all S106 monies would be held in interest-bearing accounts in line with legal requirements.

**RESOLVED** to note the Report

**57. 25/00088 - Highways Enforcement Policies**  
(Item 13)

*Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport) were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Osborne introduced the following key decision

- a) The Cabinet Member proposed to introduce two new Highways Enforcement Policies. These policies enabled the County Council to act against landowners and utility companies that had breached legislation or significantly disrupted the management of the highway network. Enforcement would only be used as a last resort, when all other avenues to resolve the issue had been exhausted.
- b) The primary aims of the discussed policies was to improve road safety, reduce delays, and ensure fairness and transparency on how highway-related non-compliance was managed.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members, the discussion covered the following:

- a) Members discussed examples of long-term infrastructure disruptions and failures by developers. Officers acknowledged the concerns and examples raised but did suggest that each individual case had its complexities and legal issues that would need to be addressed separately.
- b) The proposal was welcomed by Members especially if the policy was to be used to deal with ongoing issues with utilities companies and their impact on the roads of Kent. Members suggested that with the aid of the policy KCC could be far more robust with required timeframes for expected repairs and disruptions to the public.
- c) It was suggested that the defect list be reviewed to encompass the actions of reinstatement and if reinstatement works were deemed inadequate after a repair and that the associated contractor be summoned to amend the repair to a satisfactory standard.
- d) The Cabinet Member echoed the concerns and acknowledged the wider examples Members had shared. Officers echoed suggestions that the key decision would allow KCC to be more robust in challenging developers.
- e) On the discussion of fixed penalty notices (FPN), KCC currently issued FPNs and carried out inspections of all utility works at various stages. The new

proposed approach, if KCC intended to pursue prosecution, would not issue an FPN as this removed the legal basis for further actions. Instead KCC would begin collecting evidence against the utility company and build a formal case.

- f) KCC's approach had focused on issuing FPNs but would now shift to seeking to take enforcement actions further where necessary. Officers anticipated that the number of prosecutions would remain relatively low, as the primary objective was to send a clear message that would ultimately drive compliance and improve performance across the sector.

**RESOLVED** to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport agree to:

- a) To approve and adopt a new enforcement policy enabling Kent County Council (KCC) to take enforcement action against land owners to ensure highways users are not put at risk from non-compliance under relevant statutory provisions.
- b) To approve and adopt a new street works enforcement policy enabling KCC to take relevant enforcement action up to and including prosecution against utility companies and other entities for non-compliance failures under relevant statutory provisions

**58. 25/00110 - A28 Sturry Link Road**  
(Item 14)

*Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) Andrew Loosemore (Interim Director of Highways and Transport) were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Osborne presented the Key Decision to Members for consideration, aspects to be considered were:

- a) The A28 Sturry Link Road would be a critical piece of infrastructure required to reduce congestion and to support new housing and economic growth in Canterbury and East Kent. Although substantial funding had already been secured through developer contributions and government grants, a funding gap had remained.
- b) To address the funding gap, the County Council was seeking support from the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Bill Fund. Securing funding would assist in mitigating the financial risk to the Council and ensured that the project could proceed without delay. A decision on the funding application was expected later in the month (January 2026).

2. In response to comments and questions from Members, the discussion covered the following:

- a) Members queried that the link road project being dependent on a £9.8 million funding contribution from Homes England and if funding was not secured, or if a shortfall arises, would County Council propose to address the deficit through future Section 106 developer contributions. The Cabinet Member suggested that a shortfall was unlikely but had instructed officers to explore all options.
- b) Officers updated that the grant had successfully passed the next stage of their approvals process. Officials from the Ministry of housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) were present at that meeting. The proposal had now been passed to MHCLG for formal approval. Officers expected a decision within the next five to ten days, and the indications at the current stage remained positive.
- c) In Addition, officers responded to the £9.8 million funding gap that Members had referenced. Officers clarified that the figure did not represent the full value of the grant being requested. Homes England had applied their own contingency allowances, and their assessments did not include indexation when calculating the funding gap.
- d) KCC budgets had captured an anticipated level of indexation that would be expected to be met through developer contributions. As a result, Homes England had considered a grant value of up to £24 million, which would significantly offset the gap and reduce the overall financial risk to the County Council.
- e) Frustrations were shared on the lack of progress made with Network Rail in light of the works occurring around the Sturry train station location. Impacts to the local traffic were emphasised and included environmental concerns on the possibilities of the River Stour being impacted by building runoffs. Members asked for support in holding National Rail to account for the impacts that continued to disrupt the Sturry and Broad Oak areas.
- f) Officers highlighted the six planning conditions that related specifically to environmental matters, particularly those associated with the River Stour. Officers would be working through the process of preparing and submitting the necessary documentation to enable these conditions to be formally discharged. This included providing the evidence required to satisfy the expectations of the Environment Agency and other relevant stakeholders involved in the overall assessment.

**RESOLVED** to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport agree to:

- a) Give approval to progress the construction of the Sturry Link Road A28 roundabout and associated works utilising banked S106 funding in order to implement the planning permission for the scheme.
- b) Subject to a successful Homes England bid, delegate to the Corporate Director of Finance (S151 Officer), the authority to accept Brownfield, Infrastructure and

Land (BIL) funding from Homes England to deliver the A28 Sturry Link Road viaduct.

- c) Confirm that other decisions in Record of Decision 18/00027 and 23/00066 remain extant.
- d) Approval for any other further decisions required to allow the scheme to proceed through construction to be taken by the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations following prior consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport.

## **59. 25/00104 - Folkestone Library Long Term Location**

*(Item 15)*

*Mr Brian Collins (Deputy leader of the Council) with Rebecca Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Hugh D'Alton (Strategic Programme Manager) and James Pearson (Head of Libraries, and Registration & Archives) were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Collins presented the key item to the Members; the following was discussed:

- a) Outlined the ongoing holding costs for keeping Grace Hill and the sites current state of disrepair which had remained unchanged since December 2022. It was highlighted that this had placed significant financial pressure on the Council.
- b) Restoring Grace Hill to even a basic, habitable condition would likely require substantial expenditure. The Deputy Leader discussed that as a Council there was a responsibility to balance investment and spending across the entire County, not just at one locale.
- c) Following the closure of the Grace Hill Library in 2022, a temporary library facility was established opposite the original site to ensure continuity of service for residents.
- d) The temporary library had been in place opposite Grace Hill along with other measures since its closure in 2022. The library did not provide residents with the experience or resource levels expected of a fully operating library in the Town Centre. It had also lacked a proper adult section and a proper children's section, and although staff on site were working extremely hard the limitations of the premises had remained very restricted in delivery of offer.
- e) If the option of returning the library to the Grace Hill building was to be pursued, there would be no immediate reinstatement of services. The Deputy Leader suggested that in reality and under favourable conditions, it would likely take around three years before the building could reopen and that was only if such an investment were financially viable for the Council to pursue.
- f) The Council had agreed to look for alternative location for a temporary service in the town centre where the full-service offer could be delivered. The best site found was the former Woolworths building, 14 Sandgate Road, as a potential

site for delivering library services. This option had offered a significant opportunity. It would provide the people of Folkestone with a dedicated, fully equipped library and included a complete adult section and a complete children's section. Adult Education Services would also move into the location and align with the administration's commitment to creating spaces that offer more than a just traditional library provision and ensure that the Folkestone has a full town centre offering.

- g) The Deputy Leader acknowledged that passions were understandably running high among some residents of Folkestone and acknowledged and respected those feelings. While the intention was for the Grace Hill site to go to auction in February, that process had not yet taken place. The door was therefore not fully closed to any offers to purchase the building.
- h) The Deputy Leader elaborated that there were still time and opportunities for individuals or organisations to come forward with alternative proposals for the future of the former Grace Hill Library building. Any viable option that benefited the community could still be considered before the auction process was finalised.

2. In response to comments and questions from Members and guests, discussion covered the following:

- a) Members discussed how historically, the library service had always been delivered solely from the ground floor. There had never been a requirement for users to go upstairs or downstairs to access library services. This was the basis of the community proposal for the future use of Grace Hill: that the library would continue to operate exclusively on the ground floor, with the upper and lower floors would be repurposed for other community-led activities
- b) The Deputy Leader responded that the statement of the Grace Hill building being inherently superior to the alternative simply because the alternative is "all on one floor" did not hold. From a library-service perspective, both buildings were effectively equivalent. The service at Grace Hill had always been delivered entirely on a single level. Members also highlighted the move of Adult Education from their current property to a higher rent property in view of the Grace Hill library as a cost increase that lacked rationale. It was further noted that the Grace Hill Library had occupied two floors, with the local history collections accommodated on the upper level.
- c) Members further queried the £2.9 Million pound cost of repairs being an accurate and concise figure and raised concerns on the how the new lease at Sandgate Road for 15 years had not been brought via referral before a committee. The pedestrianisation of the new library location would also impact those with limited mobility to access the site as 'drop-off and pick up options were limited in the area.
- d) Break clauses within the temporary library lease were raised as a mechanism that could enable and allow a Creative Folkestone-led, community-based bid to take over the Grace Hill site, generate income, and take responsibility for the building's ongoing upkeep. Members added that the absence of any commercial

bids in response to previous tender invitations for the Grace Hill site could indicate limited commercial value or interest in developing the property.

- e) Mr Prater suggested that a hybrid approach could be taken with partners if they would put forward a bid that aimed to protect the Council from any revenue costs associated with that building. The proposal would support a consultation process to identify and secure funding for a full refurbishment and redevelopment of the site, bringing it up to a modern, fit-for-purpose standard. Importantly, their timeline extended through to 2030, which would provide the necessary space for that work to be fully planned and delivered. Such an approach would not only enable the community to explore a long-term vision for the building but would also safeguard the Council's asset in the meantime.
- f) The Deputy Leader acknowledged the proposal but elaborated on the current state of the Grace Hill site after his recent visit. The property was a listed (Grade II) building which also complicated matters. Issues on water ingress, roof repairs and hazardous mould were discussed. Ongoing security and holding costs also remained a notable outlay for the Council.
- g) Members noted the administration's recent renewed investment in County Hall and suggested that a similar approach could be applied to Grace Hill. It was suggested that the Grace Hill Library building had originally been gifted to the people of Folkestone in 1888 as a beacon of learning and opportunity, and therefore some Members questioned whether it should be considered KCC's asset to dispose of. The Member urged KCC to work collaboratively with Creative Folkestone and the Save Folkestone Library groups to facilitate a sustainable solution. Mr Brady confirmed his support for Option 2A, which proposed working with these groups to retain the Folkestone Library service at the Grace Hill site.
- h) Mr Brady proposed that a covenant be placed on the Grace Hill site; this proposal was seconded by Mrs Hudson. Mr Brady explained that, should Members decide not to support Option 2A which would seek to retain the building and continue working with Creative Folkestone and the Save Folkestone Library – Grace Hill campaign—then, in the event that the Council proceeds with a sale, a covenant should be applied. This covenant would ensure that the building remained in community use for the benefit of the residents of Folkestone.
- i) Members discussed the proposals set out in the amendment and suggested that it would be helpful to Members to provide some clarity on the Council's disposal policy and the relevant processes that were applied.
- j) Officers highlighted that the amendment being proposed would not align with the Council's Freehold Disposal Policy, and any decision would therefore need to be considered within the context of that policy. The Council had clear obligations regarding secure and prudent investment, and although there were circumstances in which wider social or community benefits could be considered, these must be carefully assessed as part of the decision-making process.
- k) Officers suggested that it was important to highlight the position regarding a potential auction. As referenced in the exempt paper's financial figures. Any

reserve would be informed by an up-to-date valuation and agreed in consultation with the auctioneers to ensure it was appropriate and compliant with KCC's policy requirements.

- l) Members acknowledged the clarification but suggested that the Committees role should be to set and challenge policies. Officers addressed the point and reminded the committee that the Council had adopted the Freehold disposal policy.
- m) Additional caution was urged by officers on the implications associated with application a covenant to the property. While such a covenant could protect the facility—unless it were later varied or removed—it would also affect who may be able to come forward for the property at auction. It would likely influence the value of the building and could limit the range of potential bidders and the types of proposals they might bring forward
- n) Officers reminded Members that the Grace Hill building was a listed building. Any change of use to a purpose not already permitted under current planning regulations would require planning consent. Additionally, any works that affected the historic fabric of the building would require listed building consent. These matters would fall under the jurisdiction of Folkestone & Hythe District Council, as they are the local planning authority. Kent County Council did not hold planning authority in the discussed context.
- o) The vote for Mr Bradys proposal was taken. Members requested the voting be recorded in the minutes.

For (4)

Mr Brady, Mrs Hudson, Mr Prater and Mr Hood

Against (6)

Mr Defriend, Mr Waters, Mr Paul, Mrs Porter, Mr Sian and Mr Mole.

Abstain (3)

Mr Thomas, Mr Mallon and Mr Fryer

The Chair noted that the proposal was unsuccessful.

- p) The Deputy Leader reiterated that the property would likely proceed to auction. However, it was emphasised again that the opportunity for organisations such as Creative Folkestone remained open, adding that the option had not been closed. Extensive discussions had already taken place with the organisation, and if they were still able to bring forward proposals the Council would remain receptive to discussions.
- q) Mrs Hudson expressed her strong opposition to the sale of the Grace Hill site and suggested that KCC should explore opportunities to work with the wider Folkestone community in order to identify a sustainable future for Grace Hill.

- r) Mrs Hudson proposed a vote on option 2A, the proposal was that the Council would accept Creative Folkestone's intention to work towards an alternative, grant-funded vision for the future of the Grace Hill building. During an undetermined period, the temporary library service would continue to operate from 14 Sandgate Road, on the basis that once the Grace Hill building had been brought back to life and made fully fit for purpose, the library service would return to the Grace Hill site.

3. In response to the Members concerns the Deputy Leader Discussed the following:

- a) Highlighted that the potential holding costs associated with the Grace Hill site for any interested party could amount to approximately £300,000–£500,000 over a three- to five-year period.
- b) It was important to bring Members back to the content of the paper, which sets out the extensive background to the Grace Hill and Folkestone Library matter—covering the original closure, the establishment of the temporary library, and the findings from the public consultation.
- c) The criteria by which KCC would assess proposals had been identified at a very early stage. These criteria were included within the public consultation materials and had remained consistent throughout the entire process. Documentation had been in the public domain for a significant period of time.
- d) The January 2025 key decision authorised work to identify and establish an alternative temporary library provision. This had led to the work on the temporary facility at 14 Sandgate Road and this was in direct response to views expressed as part of the public consultation as outlined in the January 2025 decision.
- e) Officers further explained how the January 2025 key decision had given all parties a clear road map for the commencement of the asset of community value process and the Councils future intentions. Officers confirmed that all community groups that had shown an interest had been contacted.
- f) The paper provided to Members had captured the appraised proposals as formally articulated to officers. Officers had engaged extensively with Creative Folkestone, and there was detailed dialogue regarding the condition of the Grace Hill building. KCC had provided information on the building itself and on the way in which KCC constructed and managed its property budgets. In addition, discussions were held regarding the service requirements that would need to be met.
- g) Officers discussed that engagement had taken place thoroughly, and it had taken place continuously since the January 2025 decision. The paper evaluated the proposal as it had been submitted. It was raised that Members may have heard speculation today that goes beyond what is included in the formal submission, but the Council could only appraise what had been written and what had been formally provided for County Council consideration.
- h) Notable concerns were raised regarding the ability of any community group to meet the ongoing holding costs associated with the Grace Hill site.

4. Members acknowledged the response from officers and in addition responded:

- a) Raised that no face-to-face meeting has taken place between Creative Folkestone and Cabinet Members. The Cabinet Member responded to the concerns and confirmed that that they were not correct. The KCC Presentation delivered and shared with the press was perceived as poor timing. disparity in the administration's approach to the Grace Hill building compared with its approach to this building here. Member urges support for option 2A, using a temporary library location and with a view of restoring Grace Hill.
- b) Returning to Mrs Hudson's proposal, which had been seconded by Mr Prater, Members requested the voting be recorded in the minutes. The vote was recorded as follows:

For (5)

Mr Brady, Mrs Hudson, Mr Hood, Mr Prater and Mr Thomas.

Against (6)

Mr Defriend, Mr Waters, Mr Paul, Mrs Porter, Mr Sian and Mr Mole.

Abstain (2)

Mr Fry and Mr Mallon

The Chair noted the second proposal was unsuccessful.

- c) Mr Thomas proposed that the decision be split and that the disposal of the Grace Hill site be deferred from auction for a period of two months to allow for further investigation. Mrs Hudson seconded the proposal. Members requested the voting be recorded in the minutes.. The vote was recorded as follows:

For (3)

Mr Thomas, Mr Hood, and Mrs Hudson.

Against (9)

Mr Brady, Mr Prater, Mr Defriend, Mr Fryer, Mr Waters, Mr Paul, Mrs Porter, Mr Sian and Mr Mole.

Abstain (1)

Mr Mallon

The Chair noted the third proposal was unsuccessful.

- d) Mrs Lawes as a local representative of Folkestone's, discussed the desire to keep the site but acknowledged the considerable costs involved. The Member

further added that herself and Cllr Baker had met directly with representatives from the Creative Foundation in the creative quarter to discuss the situation.

- e) Members suggested modifying proposal 2A to allow Creative Folkestone enough space and time to come back to the council with a full proposal that would satisfy the Council's concerns.
- f) The Deputy Leader noted the proposal but suggested that the timeframes to auction were incredibly tight and that if an organisation could make a multi-million-pound commitment over a number of years it could be looked at. It was highlighted that the period for offers to come forward had been extensive, and those parties had not made themselves visible to the Council or at this time shown any interest in acquiring the Grace Hill site.
- g) A final vote was proposed by Mr Brady and seconded by Mr Prater, The Chair clarified that this was to vote for the endorsement of option 1A and would close out the discussion. Members requested the voting be recorded in the minutes.

For (8)

Mr Defriend, Mr Mallon, Mr Fryer, Mr Waters, Mr Paul, Mrs Porter, Mr Sian and Mr Mole.

Against (4)

Mr Brady, Mr Hood, Mrs Hudson and Mr Prater.

Abstain (1)

Mr Thomas

The Chair noted the final position.

**RESOLVED** to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

That the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services agree to:

- a) Reaffirm the Council's commitment to delivering a sustainable, comprehensive town-centre Library and Registration Service in Folkestone.
- b) Note the outcome of the 2 Grace Hill Asset of Community Value and marketing process, including the outcome of the KCC evaluation of Creative Folkestone's proposal alongside other options for the library service.
- c) Confirm 14 Sandgate Road as the location of the Folkestone town centre Library and Registration service for the foreseeable future.
- d) Confirm that the Council remains open to considering the location of the library service as part of its ongoing estates management best practice. With the next review now likely to take place in late 2028.

- e) Confirm that the Council will progress with open market disposal of the Grace Hill building.
- f) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in liaison with the Deputy Leader, to finalise terms and enter contracts necessary to implement the decision regarding the Grace Hill building and the Sandgate Road building

## **60. Work Programme**

*(Item 16)*

The work programme was noted.