

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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, 5 May 2026.

PRESENT: Mr A Brady, Mr J Defriend (Chairman), Mr M A J Hood, Mrs. S Hudson, Mr T Mallon (Vice-Chair), Mr M Paul, Mrs. B Porter, Mr T Prater, Mr R Waters, Mr D Sian, Mrs. M Lawes, Mr P Thomas and Mr T Mole (Substitute)

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs Georgia Foster (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Mr Jamie Henderson (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health), Mr David Wimble (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), Chris Burwash (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Mr Mark Mulvihill (Deputy Cabinet Member Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health) and Mr Ben Fryer (Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Steve Samson (Head of Economy), Tom Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place), Matthew Smyth (Director of Environment and Waste), Elizabeth Milne (Head of Environment), Graham Rusling (Head of PROW CL&VGS and Access), Natalie Liddiard (Head of Gypsy Roma Traveller Resident Service), Abigail Roscoe (Senior Assistant Project Manager), Shane Bushell (Head of Service: Public Transport), Richard Emmett (Head of Highways) and James Willis (Democratic Service Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

78. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Thorpe. Mr Mole was the designated Substitute.

An update on the Membership of the Committee was provided. Mrs Lawes and Mr Thomas had now joined.

79. Declarations of Interest

(Item 3)

No declarations of interest were received.

80. Minutes of the meeting held on 10.03.2026

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 10 March 2026 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

81. Verbal Updates

(Item 5)

Georgia Foster (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Jamie Henderson (Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health), 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:

- a) Groundwork for the installation of electric chargers had commenced and work had also begun to support the Thameside Fastrack network. Once fully completed the entire network would be operating with electric vehicles.
- b) The Strategic Resilience Team (SRT) had commenced work with the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum, partner agencies, the Police, National Highways, and other authorities to develop plans for traffic management on the approaches to the Kents ports and Channel crossings.
- c) All UK nationals travelling to the EU were required to register under the Exit/Entry System (EES), which was likely to increase crossing times for those travelling across the Channel. It was noted that the full biometric system had not yet been implemented, with registration currently taking place at customs booths. These impacts were expected to add additional processing time for Operation Brock.
- d) Operation Brock would continue to be used for the foreseeable future with no viable alternative having yet to be identified. The SRT had been working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to explore technological alternatives, and it was suggested that any solution explored would unlikely provide a quick fix.
- e) Members were informed that Telent Technology Services (TTS) had successfully retained the maintenance contract for traffic systems assets across Kent following a comprehensive bidding and assessment process.
- f) The new contract had commenced on 1st April. The SRT had been working with TTS to align new processes and develop the associated performance measures. The transition was well underway and had progressed smoothly. No disruption to service delivery had been observed and positive engagement from Telent staff and strong leadership from the local contract manager were noted.
- g) The update highlighted that the previous Winter had been relatively mild. However, there had still been a spike in salt runs in January 2026 which had remained consistent with patterns observed in previous years.

- h) Between April 2025 and March 2026, more than 50,000 potholes had been repaired. A total of 35,000 potholes had been formally reported with 22,500 of those reports being submitted between January and March 2026.
- i) Despite unprecedented demand and significant pressure on services it was indicated that teams had demonstrated resilience, professionalism, and a strong commitment throughout the period. It was discussed that reducing the overall number of potholes remained challenging due to ongoing underlying factors.
- j) The new local highways maintenance contract had been launched with four new suppliers appointed to support patching and repair works. The Structures Fund had opened for scheme submissions. Only one bid per authority was permitted except in exceptional circumstances. KCC had submitted two bids: the primary bid for Galley Hill and a secondary bid for the A299 structures, tunnels and carriageway reconstruction.
- k) The Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP) was commencing. A revision had been due this year and would now be required following the DfT letter on revised transparency reporting requirements and was to be expected to be released within the month.
- l) A new School Street trial had been launched at Snodland C of E Primary School to improve safety and the environment during drop-off and pick-up times. Temporary vehicle restrictions operated between 08:00–09:00 and 14:30–15:30, Monday to Friday and during term time.
- m) The Road Safety and Active Travel Group parish seminar had recently taken place. The session had provided practical content to support local engagement, and the team had shared resources and toolkits for parish use. Discussions throughout had been constructive and insightful.

2. Mr Wimble, delivered his verbal update:

- a) The Committee received an update on Skills Bootcamps. Strong outcomes continued to be achieved and during Wave 6 of the programme between July 2025 and March 2026, the programme had seen 500 learners enrolled. Of these, 92% had completed the bootcamp and gained a qualification. This had significantly exceeded the national average and outperformed set targets.
- b) It was reported that 43% of learners had already secured positive outcomes, including new employment, improved roles, or contracts for those who were self-employed. Members were advised that further outcomes were expected in the coming months. The remaining 8% who did not complete, most had left early due to securing employment which was discussed as an overall positive outcome.
- c) Members were informed that Wave 7 had commenced and had provided over 400 new learner places, supported by £1.5 million of funding from the Department for Work and Pensions. The programme covered priority sectors including health, construction, social care, and early years support. This had resulted in an aligning of the training provision with current labour market demands.

- d) The Committee also received an update on the first 9 months of delivery for the Connect to Work programme where the number of people reporting employment outcomes was increasing.
- e) From April 2026 delivery had been strengthened through the addition of two new partners. The Shore Trust and Forward Trust would work alongside existing education providers. The partnership aimed to support 9,000 individuals over the lifetime of the programme. The Cabinet Member indicated that this was a firm commitment rather than a target.
- f) The Kent and Medway Growth Hub had supported 1,400 businesses in the previous year, providing advice, guidance, and confidence to enable growth. Further updates were provided on financial support, noting that the Kent and Medway Business Fund had issued 38 loans totalling £5 million. This was recognised as direct investment into businesses, supporting job creation. Members were advised that the maximum loan value would be increased from £600,000 to £750,000 in the following year to further support business growth.
- g) The Committee received an update on tourism. In 2024 there had been 66 million visits and generating £4.1 billion for the local economy. This represented a return to pre-pandemic levels and had been achieved more quickly than been previously widely anticipated.
- h) It was reported that tourism supported over 82,000 jobs in Kent, accounting for 11% of total employment, and was therefore considered a key component of the local economy. Members were advised that promotional activity was ongoing. A recent St Pancras campaign had reached 13 million people through outdoor advertising, with a further 1.7 million reached digitally, promoting Kent's coast, countryside and gardens to London audiences. A dedicated campaign focusing on coastal towns was scheduled as the next phase of activity.
- i) Kent would be showcased nationally at the UK Real Estate Investment Forum in Leeds, alongside the Gatwick Economic Zone. It was emphasised that the area was not only open for business but was actively seeking inward investment.
- j) The continued importance of Kent's food and drink sector was discussed. The Taste of Kent Awards were confirmed to be returning for their 20th year, celebrating local producers and recognising the importance of identity, quality, and support for the county's businesses.
- k) An update was also provided on the No Use Empty programme. Over 9,000 empty properties had been brought back into use, creating homes and opportunities that would otherwise have remained vacant.
- l) It was further reported that the programme was now working in partnership with the Kent & Medway Business Fund. £3.8 million was being invested into two new projects to deliver 25 commercial units in New Romney and Thanet..

3. Mrs Foster delivered her verbal update.

- a) The Cabinet Member gave thanks to officers, recognising that briefings had been delivered with enthusiasm and that officers had been working diligently to arrange visits as part of the Member's induction into the portfolio. Appreciation was also recorded for the work undertaken by the previous Cabinet Member Mr Webb.
- b) The Committee was informed that Folkestone Library and Community Learning Centre had confirmed its opening date as Tuesday 29th May. The new facility was located in the town centre on Sandgate Road.
- c) The centre would provide modern classrooms and teaching spaces for adult learning courses, alongside both adult and children's library services, including access to the local history collection.
- d) The facility would also offer accessible spaces for reading, studying, learning and community events, as well as digital facilities, including free public Wi-Fi, computer access and would also accommodate birth and death registration appointments.
- e) Co-location projects in Kent had remained on track. Already completed were Stanhope, Temple Hill, Cranbrook and Sittingbourne, which were all co-located with family centres. The final two in the phase would be Queenborough and Cliftonville, which had progressed well and was expected to reopen in early June.
- f) Technology Enabled Live service (TELS) would again hosting drop-in sessions in libraries. Dates and locations for those would be announced soon.
- g) The Committee received a progress update on the refurbishment works at Manor Gate House Registry Office in Dartford. It was reported that the works had delivered a new ceremony space and improved office accommodation for staff.
- h) As a result, the service would require less space within the building. Ceremonies had already recommenced at the refurbished venue and that the service would now be actively promoting it as a ceremony location within Dartford.
- i) Positive updates were provided in relation to library services. The Committee was informed that James Fisher and Zachary Wells, who worked across libraries in Thanet, had been shortlisted in the Libraries Connected Awards in the Children and Young People category.
- j) The Committee was informed that the Culture and Creative Economy Service had secured a capital grant of £865,000 from Arts Council England's Creative Foundations Fund.
- k) Funding had been allocated to essential maintenance and capital works to safeguard the Turner Contemporary building. Investment would ensure that the gallery remained safe, accessible, and operational in the long term. The works were also expected to protect the building's infrastructure and support its continued ability to host exhibitions.

- l) The Committee received an update from Trading Standards regarding a significant fraud case which had recently concluded following several years within the court system.
- m) Members were informed that two individuals, operating as builders, had been found guilty after a nine-week trial at Crown Court. The case had involved 19 victims across Kent, with fraud totalling approximately £1.4 million. Sentencing was scheduled to take place later in the month.
- n) It was reported that a new Vape Compliance Officer had been appointed, with the role fully funded by Public Health. The officer would work in close partnership with the Illegal Tobacco Officer, the Youth Harm Reduction Officer, and apprentices funded by the Department of Health and Social Care to address underage sales and tackle illegal tobacco and vape activity across the County.
- o) Officers had also supported Kent Police in the closure of an illegal tobacco shop in Maidstone. It was highlighted that this action had been made possible through timely intelligence checks undertaken by the Innovation and Business Intelligence team. The team had played a major role in the identification of the landlords involved.
- p) Trading Standards activities at Kents ports were discussed. Joint working in partnership with the UK Border Force had resulted in the interception of two lorry loads containing over 300,000 illegal disposable vapes being smuggled through Kent.
- q) Members were also made aware of wider sector challenges, including reports in the press regarding abuse and threats of violence faced by Trading Standards officers from criminal gangs. Whilst it was acknowledged that these particular incidents had not occurred within Kent, the Committee recognised the risks and challenges faced by officers in carrying out their duties.

4. Mr Henderson delivered his verbal update.

- a) Kent County Council was developing a Coastal Regeneration Strategy aimed at bringing together existing programmes and partners to more effectively target support for coastal communities facing long-term challenges. The new strategy would focus on improving locations, strengthening town centres, visitor economy, and supporting jobs and skills through a coordinated approach.
- b) May was National Walking Month with a number of activities being promoted through Explore Kent to encourage walking for wellbeing and connection with nature. It was reported that efforts were being made to ensure accessibility across routes and Country parks. Work at Trosley Country Park to reduce health inequalities by removing barriers to outdoor activity for disabled people and those with long-term conditions was a notable example of the work that had been undertaken.
- c) Explore Kent had completed joint works to redesign the Ramsgate to Broadstairs section of the King Charles III England Coast Path map. The work

had focused on addressing practical issues such as safety, obstacles and user confidence. Feedback would be used to inform a more accessible map and in addition 12 participants were being trained as volunteer walk leaders to support inclusive local walks.

- d) Members were also informed that short accessibility videos, tailored walking guides and 360-degree imagery for the coastal path had been launched to aid users plan journeys and select suitable routes.

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

- a) Members queried if more funds could be allocated to the 'No-use empty' initiative. The relevant Cabinet Member responded that they would look to explore the request and indicated that further discussions would take place with Mr Collins (Deputy Leader) to explore the potential reallocation of funding.
- b) Officers responded to question on the numbers of care leavers that were attending Skills boot camps and advised Members that a specific figure relating to care leavers was not available at the time. Officers discussed the close working arrangements that were in place with the Adult Social Care leavers team to ensure that opportunities through Connect to Work and Skills Bootcamps were effectively promoted to this cohort.
- c) Concerns were raised on the impact of EES, and the traffic throttling measures in place to mitigate the impact to coastal areas. Officers highlighted that there were no legislative powers available to direct or redirect tourist traffic. Existing powers had allowed only for the holding of HGV traffic under Operation Brock; equivalent measures were not in place for general traffic management.
- d) The primary approach would therefore focus on providing timely information and guidance to the public, including journey planning, awareness of disruption, and identification of safe routes. It was further reported that contingency sites were under consideration should conditions worsen. Overall, the current position remained one of warning and informing to ensure that residents and visitors were aware of the prevailing situation.
- e) Members observed that provisions for the current financial year had reduced to 400 learner places and represented a decrease of around 20%. Officers explained that figures had been reconfigured due to a reduction of funding from the Department of Education.
- f) Queries on what lesson learnt had been garnered from the increased cost of maintaining the Turner Contemporary building. Officers advised that the KCC Infrastructure team would be responsible for overseeing and managing the Turner Contemporary building. It was further highlighted that lessons relating to the management and maintenance of the facility continued to be addressed on an ongoing basis by the infrastructure team.
- g) The Committee sought clarification on updated figures relating to the highway asset management backlog. Members were informed that the total backlog for all highway assets was currently estimated at just over £1 billion. This

compared to a previous figure of £770 million, which related solely to the highway network rather than all associated assets.

- h) Additionally, the estimate was being reassessed through a new asset condition survey. Based on earlier analysis, an indicative annual investment of approximately £150 million would be required to address the backlog.
- i) In response to further questions, it was clarified that the £1 billion figure had been rounded for simplicity and did not indicate a significant improvement from the previously reported total of £1.3 billion. A request was made for a detailed breakdown of the figures to be provided separately.
- j) Pothole repairs were discussed and Members asked if data was being collected on the outcomes of interventions, including the number of temporary measures in place, instances of failure were being collected by Officers. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the data set were collected.
- k) Returning to skills bootcamps, Members asked if the monitoring was undertaken over the short, medium and long term to track participant outcomes. Members urged the importance of following up on individuals who had completed the programme in order to assess the longevity of the impact and to inform continuous improvement, ensuring the programme delivered maximum value.
- l) The Committee was advised that there was a requirement, now overseen by the Department for Work and Pensions, to monitor learner outcomes for a period of six months following completion of Skills Bootcamps.
- m) Monitoring encompassed course completion and qualifications achieved. Key outcome measures such as job interviews for those unemployed, progression into enhanced roles for those already in work, and new contracts secured by self-employed participants were also captured.
- n) The Committee enquired if there were plans to further maximise the use of library assets through additional co-location opportunities. Reference was made to existing examples such as Temple Hill and the potential for integrating libraries with services including family hubs, skills provisions and care services.
- o) The associated Cabinet Member confirmed that co-location had remained an ongoing initiative, with sites being continually reviewed to assess their suitability for accommodating multiple services within a single building.

RESOLVED to note the Verbal Updates

82. Winter Service Update (Item 6)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport) and Richard Emmett (Head of Highways) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Osborne presented the following:

- a) The Committee received the annual update on Winter Services which outlined planning and delivery arrangements for the 2025–26 winter period, including the response to severe weather conditions.
- b) The report highlighted key areas of good practice, lessons learned, and actions being taken to maintain road safety and improve preparedness for the forthcoming winter season.

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

- a) Clarification on how salting routes were determined, including the extent to which crash data and lessons learned were used to inform route planning.
- b) Members asked how agile the process was, specifically whether live or emerging incident and crash data could be used to review, consult, and amend salting routes within the operational plan where necessary.
- c) The Committee was advised that crash data across the network was received from Kent Police, although there could be a delay of six to nine months before full reports were available, particularly in cases involving injury.
- d) Once received, this information was reviewed by the Casualty Reduction Team (CRT) and shared across highway services to inform learning and identify any necessary actions. It was further reported that where crash investigations identified issues with infrastructure, the authority had a duty to address these accordingly.
- e) The officer explained that understanding road-surface temperatures, combined with historic knowledge of the network, informed how roads were treated and supported an appropriate response during adverse weather conditions.
- f) Queried the reliance on farmers for snow-ploughing, highlighting concerns that rising insurance costs may deter participation. Asked whether any support or supplementary insurance mechanisms exist. Officers noted the issue and agreed to investigate further.
- g) Members requested that future reports include clearer information on road-condition trends, total expenditure for the service, and any implications for reserves.
- h) Officers acknowledged the concern and outlined the statutory obligations of the service. Operational reserves such as the 16,800 tonnes of salt (equivalent to 12 days' supply) were addressed as a key example of successful forward planning.
- i) In response to a number of suggestions, Members were advised that delivery followed the existing policy framework, and any changes would require further discussion with Cabinet Members and the administration. It was confirmed that

the service was currently budget-balanced, with resources fully aligned to deliver the existing Winter Service provision.

RESOLVED to note the Winter Service Update.

83. Tilbury-Gravesend Ferry Update
(Item 7)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport) and Shane Bushell (Head of Service: Public Transport) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Osborne presented the following:

- a) The Committee was informed that, following Thurrock Council's withdrawal of funding and further engagement with partners, no alternative funding had been secured.
- b) Support would continue to be provided to the Port of London Authority as it led efforts to identify a viable commercial solution.

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

- a) The Committee expressed concerns that responsibility for the issue appeared to have shifted to the Port of London Authority following the withdrawal of funding by Thurrock Council, where it had previously been a joint responsibility.
- b) Members raised disappointment with the outcome and emphasised the importance of the service, particularly in relation to culture and economic development. It was discussed that funding had previously been drawn from similar sources to those used for bus services and that the current position would represent the likely end of the Gravesend–Tilbury Ferry service.
- c) The Cabinet Member addressed the concerns raised and advised that government guidance had clearly stated that any revival of the service would need to be financially self-sustaining, with no public subsidy.
- d) The Committee acknowledged the position, noting reports that Thurrock Council had engaged in discussions which confirmed that any future ferry service would need to operate on a fully self-sustaining basis.
- e) Discussed the negative impact to residents in Gravesham, Northfleet and the wider Dartford area, noting the loss as significant. Members expressed hope that options to reinstate the service could be explored in the future and committed to continuing to advocate for the ferry's restoration where possible.

- f) Officers explained that Thurrock Council had withdrawn its funding in 2024 and had been involved in tentative discussions with Kent County Council. However, (to date) Thurrock Council had not yet provided a definitive position on the future of the ferry and had not committed to any alternative funding arrangements.

RESOLVED to note the Gravesend-Tilbury Ferry Update.

84. 26/00020 - Kent Travel Saver (KTS)-Price Increase
(Item 8)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport) and Shane Bushell (Head of Service: Public Transport) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Osborne presented the following:

- a) The Committee was informed that the Kent Travel Saver pass currently supported approximately 23,000 students to travel to school by bus through discounted fares.
- b) The cost of operating the scheme had increased, primarily due to higher charges from bus operators and rising demands. Whilst Government funding had provided some support, this would not fully offset the increased costs.
- c) It was reported that, in order to maintain the scheme's sustainability and affordability, a proposed annual fee increase of £35 for fee-paying users was being considered. The Cabinet Member elaborated that despite the increase, the pass would continue to represent good value for money when compared to standard bus fares and would safeguard support for those most in need.

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

- a) Concerns regarding the proposed increase impact to 3,100 low-income families, noting a rise of 26% (from £135 to £170 per child), equating to an overall additional cost of £108,000 were raised by a number of Members.
- b) Members queried the distribution of low-income passholders across districts and questioned the rationale for the scale of the increase, particularly in comparison to the previous year's 12.5% rise and average fare increases of around 6%. Concern was expressed that low-income families were being disproportionately affected.
- c) Further questions were raised regarding the role of bus operators, including whether the increase reflected operator requests or anticipated cost pressures. Members additionally queried on how cost increases were validated, including

whether access to operator financial data or audit mechanisms were in place to ensure that funding requests were justified.

- d) Officers explained that eligibility for the reduced-cost Kent Travel Saver pass were based on qualification for targeted free school meals, and that any eligible family in Kent would be able to apply for and receive the reduced fare.
 - e) The Committee was further informed that increases to costs were not directly set by operator requests but were calculated through a concessionary travel funding mechanism aligned with Department for Transport (DfT) requirements. It was explained that a formula determined reimbursement to operators based on journeys undertaken and reflected the fares that would otherwise have been paid.
 - f) Cost increases had been influenced by factors including rising operator fares and additional usage of the scheme, which had seen significant expansion in recent years.
 - g) Members questioned if operators were being reimbursed at an appropriate level under the concessionary travel scheme, referring to concerns that reimbursement rates might exceed the principle that operators should be “no better off and no worse off.”
 - h) Clarification was sought on how the Council challenged and verified operator claims to ensure that reimbursement accurately reflected actual foregone revenue and did not result in unintended profit.
 - i) Officers acknowledged the points and responded that the cost associated with each pass varied depending on usage. Members noted that the reimbursement mechanism included a “generation factor” within its calculation.
 - j) It was explained that this factor accounted for additional journeys generated as a result of the scheme being more attractive than standard commercial fares. The approach was intended to ensure compliance with the principle that operators should be no better off and no worse off overall.
 - k) Members suggested that the subject of operator profit be explored further at some point. The Committee queried the interaction between BSIP-funded subsidised routes and the Kent Travel Saver scheme.
 - l) Questions were raised whether the Council was required to reimburse operators for Travel Saver journeys on routes that were already subsidised, and if so, raised concerns that this could result in the Council effectively funding both the service provision and the passenger usage.
3. Additional comments and questions from Members, encompassed the following:
- a) The Committee was advised that bus service contracts were structured in two main ways. In some cases, operators retained passenger revenue, including concessionary reimbursements. This aspect would be reflected in their contract pricing through the competitive tender process.

- b) Officers discussed that the Council did not pay the full cost of the service, as anticipated revenue was considered. It was noted that contracts were increasingly structured so that the Council assumed the financial risk or benefit. In these instances, fare revenue had effectively operated as an internal funding mechanism between the Travel Saver scheme and the supported bus service budget. Officers reassured Members that the Council did not pay twice for the same service provision and passenger usage.
- c) In response to a question on projected costs, officers advised that increases within the scheme reflected assumed inflation in both the number of passes issued and the volume of journeys undertaken, as well as increases in the per-journey reimbursement rate. It was noted that there had been a consistent rise in pass numbers from 2021/22 through to 2024/25, with this growth largely driven by an increase in free and reduced-cost passes.
- d) The Committee further discussed a shift in the overall composition of passholders, with a decreasing proportion contributing full or partial payments. This trend was identified as a key factor contributing to the anticipated financial pressure for the forthcoming scheme year.
- e) Members asked if the full increase of £35 was necessary, although it was noted that this would be partially mitigated by the option for payment by monthly instalments.
- f) Raised questions regarding the financial assumptions set out in the report, noting that paragraph 5.1 identified £479,000 in inflationary pressures, while paragraph 5.3 projected £575,000.
- g) In additional income from the proposed £35 increase, leaving an apparent surplus of approximately £96,000. Members suggested that, based on these figures, there may be scope to reduce the level of increase, particularly for the 3,100 low-income passholders, and queried whether a smaller rise could be applied.
- h) The Committee therefore asked whether the remaining amount was being retained as a contingency or reserve, and whether this approach was appropriate in the context of the impact on users.
- i) In response officers advised that the final cost of the scheme would ultimately depend on actual usage over the course of the year, with a detailed methodology underpinning the calculation and advised that it was not possible to reliably predict a surplus at year-end. It was further indicated that any such surplus would likely be managed through existing mechanisms, including alignment with Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding.
- j) Concerns regarding the application of a flat £35 increase across all users, noting that this represented a proportionally higher increase for those on reduced or supported fares compared to those paying the full cost.
- k) Members observed that this approach could place a greater financial burden on lower-income families and queried the rationale for applying a uniform increase rather than a percentage-based approach.

- l) Clarification on whether alternative models had been considered, specifically an option applying a consistent percentage increase across different fee bands to achieve the same overall revenue of £575,000, and why this approach had not been adopted.
- m) The Committee was advised that the approach to fee increases had considered the growing disparity between full-fare and reduced-fare users over recent years. Full-fare charges had increased considerably in the past, while reduced fares for low-income users had remained relatively stable. This had resulted in a widening gap between the two groups.
- n) Officers explained that further increasing full fares alone would have effectively required those users to continue subsidising reduced-fare users to a greater extent. It was explained that this had been a key consideration in the decision to apply a flat rate increase across the scheme.
- o) Members expressed strong concerns regarding the proposed flat £35 increase, noting that it placed a disproportionate burden on lower-income families and departed from the Council's previous approach of protecting those eligible for reduced fares.
- p) A recommendation was proposed and seconded that a percentage increase be explored. The recommendation was put to the vote:

The recommendation was put to the vote and unsuccessful.

- q) A recommendation was proposed and seconded to endorse the original decision:

The recommendation was put to the vote and was successful.

4. Mr Hood asked that his objection to the KTS price increase be noted in the minutes.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

- a) APPROVE the increase in the price of KTS and
- b) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director to take all relevant actions and decisions necessary for its implementation.

85. 26/00019 - A226 Galley Hill Road

(Item 9)

Peter Osborne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport). Simon Jones (Corporate Director for Growth Environment and Transport) and Abigail Roscoe (Senior Assistant Project Manager) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Osborne presented the following:

- a) The Committee received an update on the ongoing closure of Galley Hill Road, which had been in place since the collapse in April 2023 and continued to cause disruption to residents, the local road network, and bus services.
- b) Members were advised that the immediate priority following the incident had been to ensure public safety, including securing the site and undertaking detailed investigations and feasibility work to understand the cause of the collapse and identify viable options.
- c) The purpose of the report was to seek Member support to progress the preferred option to the detailed design stage. It was discussed that work would continue to secure external funding, including a pre-submission bid to relevant funding streams and also to pursue the recovery of costs from third parties.

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

- a) Members thanked the Dartford Councillors that had aided in the facilitation of resolving the issues around Galley Hill in addition the works and coordination of Highways and Transport officers was commended.
- b) The Committee placed on record its thanks for the submission of the Structures Fund bid and for the expenditure to date of just over £1 million in progressing a solution to the Galley Hill Road issue.
- c) Members asked that consideration be given to including a standing agenda item at future meetings to provide regular updates on the progress of the bid and the subsequent delivery of the project. This would be captured in future Cabinet Member verbal updates.
- d) Officers outlined that a draft submission to the technical advisory body was due to be submitted by 19 June. It was noted that feedback would be received on the draft and subsequently used to strengthen the final bid.
- e) Final submission deadline was scheduled for the 3rd of August, at which point a full and final proposal would be submitted for assessment by the Technical Advisory Body and the Department for Transport. It was further reported that funding decisions were expected in the autumn, with successful schemes required to commence reporting from 1 April the following year.
- f) The Committee was advised that a number of internal funding avenues had been explored. Originally anticipated internal funding had not been secured at the time of reporting, but an alternative solution had since been identified. As a

result, there was no current risk to progressing the scheme and the earlier funding concerns would no longer be considered relevant.

- g) Officers highlighted that further investigation was required to understand the root cause of the incident, including whether issues relating to utilities had contributed. In addition, there were a number of associated legal considerations that would remain under review.
- h) Members raised concerns on funds being drawn from elsewhere in the County to fund the Galley Hill works being of a negative impact. The Committee was advised that, in the event of an unsuccessful Structures Fund bid, further action would be pursued to recover the affected land and would include efforts to restore the road, subject to the outcome of ongoing investigations into liability for the defect.
- i) Clarification was sought on the two bids that had been submitted and the specifically the cost of £490,000 on the feasibility fund bid. Officers clarified that consideration had been given to utilising a feasibility reserve, described as a dedicated reserve within the authority to support the development of feasibility plans for structures and related projects. However, it was noted that this reserve was not currently available.
- j) Officers reported that work was therefore underway to explore how the required £490k could be secured, including consideration of other capital programmes and available funding within the highways and transportation portfolio. Confidence was expressed that the funding could be identified through a range of potential approaches.
- k) In addition, subject to a successful bid to the structures fund, the expenditure would be capitalised and allocated accordingly, ensuring that there would be no financial burden on the authority.
- l) Members were informed of the Structures Fund and the strong support for the scheme from the local MP and County Councillors. It was noted that a bid was required despite the clear need arising from the impacts at Galley Hill.
- m) Members acknowledged the need to consider next steps should the bid be unsuccessful, and it was placed on record that there was cross-party support for the project. The estimated cost of £50 million was noted, and it was expressed that it would be disappointing if the scheme did not proceed.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

- a) Progress the design through the next stages of development up to and including detailed design including any survey works.
- b) Give approval to carry out public engagement on the proposed scheme.

- c) Give approval to prepare and submit funding bids (including to the Structures Fund or successor programmes) to support the detailed design and development stage of the scheme.
- d) Give approval for any further decisions required to allow the scheme to proceed through to and including detailed design to be taken by the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment & Transport under the Officer Scheme of Delegations.

86. KMEF-Ambition 5

(Item 10)

David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities) and Steve Samson (Head of Economy) were in attendance for this item

1. Mr Wimble presented the following:

- a) The Committee received the final in a series of five updates on progress with the Kent and Medway Economic Framework, which had been adopted in March 2024 by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, including local authorities, private sector representatives, and further and higher education partners.
- b) Ambition 5 had focused on promoting locations, with emphasis on the rural economy, the cultural and creative sectors, and opportunities to showcase the County nationally and internationally.
- c) Officers highlighted the role of the Kent and Medway Business Fund in supporting local firms within the creative and digital sectors. It was also reported that the Local Growth Plan (LGP) was being developed and would highlight opportunities for sector clustering, as well as future skills and employment priorities.
- d) The Committee was advised that a second focus related to creative places, including activity across districts to develop and promote cultural venues and enhance both resident and visitor spend.
- e) Third focus area addressed the rural economy, including support for agri-tech and agri-food businesses through Produced in Kent (PiK) membership. The Grow in Kent and Medway programme was also recognised for its contribution to innovation in the food and drink sector.
- f) The Committee was informed of ongoing work relating to the natural environment, including a cross-border geopark initiative with northern France. It was noted that a prospective UNESCO bid was being explored, which could support economic growth and business opportunities across protected landscapes on both sides of the Channel.
- g) Members received an update on the visitor economy, noting that the Visit Kent service had been brought in house in November. It was reported that plans

were in development for a forthcoming coastal campaign, alongside a campaign promoting viticulture.

- h) Recent promotional activity was highlighted, including collaborations with the high-speed rail service to London and billboard campaigns aimed at increasing footfall and raising awareness of Kent and Medway's visitor offer.

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

- a) The Committee acknowledged the importance of the film industry to Kent's economy and its potential contribution to the visitor economy. Members queried how activity relating to tourism and the film industry could be better aligned to maximise economic benefits, including opportunities to attract visitors, promote filming locations, and enhance the county's overall offer.
- b) It was advised that the Kent Film Office (KFO) had continued to play a key role in promoting the county as a filming location, supported by communications activity and local media coverage.
- c) Recent filming activity at Dungeness for an upcoming feature film were discussed and it was reported that such opportunities had been actively publicised to raise awareness. It was acknowledged that efforts would continue, within available budgets, to promote Kent and maximise the benefits of film activity for the local economy and visitor offer.
- d) Concerns were raised regarding the challenges posed by diminishing water supply in the context of planned development across Kent and highlighted the potential impact on the agricultural sector, particularly arable and livestock farming, noting that previous water shortages had led to serious consequences, including the loss of livestock. The Committee sought clarification on how these risks would be addressed going forward.
- e) The Cabinet Member responded to the concerns raised regarding water resilience, advising that there was unlikely to be any funding from central government for new water reservoirs and supplies in the foreseeable future.
- f) Members suggested exploring how additional external funding and investment could be leveraged to support economic development, particularly in light of pressures on existing resources.
- g) In response the importance of growing the visitor economy was highlighted, alongside recognition of recent efforts to strengthen this area. Updates were also sought on the potential reopening of Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations, noting that this would have a significant positive impact on economic growth and connectivity within Kent.
- h) Despite budget constraints and the relatively small allocation for the visitor economy, there were initiatives in development aimed at increasing revenue and strengthening the promotion of Kent.

- i) Approximately £100,000 of private sector investment had been secured to support the visitor economy service within its initial months of operation. The new service was due to be formally launched to industry stakeholders at Leeds Castle, with partners and stakeholders, and that this was expected to support further revenue generation.
- j) An update was also provided on Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations. It was reported that, while progress remained gradual, significant work was ongoing behind the scenes, including technical discussions and partnership working between KCC, district councils, Government departments, MPs, and London St Pancras high speed, with the aim of securing the reopening of both stations.

RESOLVED to note the KMEF-Ambition 5 Report.

87. 26/00026 - Position Statement on Solar Generation
(Item 11)

David Wimble (Cabinet Member for Economic Developments and Special Projects), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities) and Tom Marchant (Assistant Director Strategic Development and Place) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Wimble presented the following:

- a) The Committee was advised that the proposal formed part of the Council's wider energy policy, originally established in 2014, and reflected a position consistent with national policy principle.
- b) Support remained for solar energy development in appropriate locations, such as rooftops and brownfield sites. However, it was emphasised that protecting the county's food economy was also a key priority.
- c) A position statement had been developed opposing large-scale solar developments and battery energy storage systems on high-grade agricultural land (Grades A1–A3). It was noted that this approach reflected the Council's stated policy position and would inform the development of the emerging energy policy.

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

- a) Members raised concerns on the legal status and scope of the position statement, as set out within the report. Members highlighted that the document was non-statutory, did not constitute formal policy, and would not be binding or determinative in planning decisions.

- b) Additionally, Members suggested that the statement appeared limited in scope, with no clear consideration of a wider spatial strategy for solar development, community involvement or ownership models, or the overall role of solar in supporting local energy resilience.
 - c) Members also highlighted the lack of reference to the economic implications for farmers, particularly the potential loss of income from land use diversification, and the absence of detail on how such impacts might be mitigated. Additionally, Members highlighted that there was limited discussion of long-term protections or strategic planning considerations.
 - d) The Cabinet Member introducing the item explained that the proposal had been brought forward in line with a policy commitment on which Members had been elected and was intended to form part of the Council's emerging energy policy, with the aim of strengthening its influence.
 - e) Concern was raised on the long-term impact of large-scale solar arrays, particularly in areas such as Romney Marsh, and had included potential environmental consequences at the end of the array's operational life and uncertainty over responsibility for remediation and clean-up costs.
 - f) It was suggested that the use of agricultural land for solar development should be considered only as a last resort, and that stronger opposition to such development within the county should be articulated. Reference was made to the importance of protecting the county's landscape and wider economic interests.
 - g) In response it was explained that the original proposal submitted to officers had been amended following advice that it could not be implemented to the extent originally envisaged.
 - h) Members additionally raised the political nature of the decision and noted that the purpose of the item was unclear, as the report lacked key definitions, including what constituted a large-scale solar array, and therefore lacked practical clarity although there was general agreement on prioritising rooftop solar and suggested that the Council should take greater action by installing solar panels on its own estate, including schools, with potential financial benefits.
- 3) It was proposed by Mr Thomas that the Committee simply note the Statement. This was seconded by Mr Prater and the Committee agreed

The meeting was adjourned for a comfort break

- a) Upon resumption of the meeting and before moving on to any other item of business, the Chair sought clarification from the Committee in relation to the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member to adopt the Solar Farm Position Statement. Specifically, with technical advice provided by the Clerk, the Chair explained that it was necessary to be clear as to whether the Committee was endorsing the decision, making specific recommendations or refusing to

endorse the decision, providing instead only a comment that the proposed Statement was noted.

- b) Following discussion by the Committee, including points of procedure raised by Members regarding the prior agreement to note the Statement, the Chairman continued the item, allowing Members to discuss the Statement further and to make any specific recommendations

3) A recommendation was proposed and seconded that consideration should be deferred until further detail was available within the forthcoming policy document, noting that the current paper was a high-level position statement with limited detail. It was recommended that a more comprehensive policy statement be brought back to the Committee for consideration and decision.

The recommendation was put to the vote and unsuccessful.

4) A Member proposed that the paper be endorsed, noting that any additional detail or granularity arising through subsequent policy development could be considered and scrutinised by the Committee at a later stage, thereby enabling progress to be made at this time. The recommendation was seconded.

RESOLVED by majority vote, that the proposed Cabinet Member decision, set out below, be endorsed:

- a) ADOPT the Solar Developments Position Statement.
- b) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director to take all necessary actions and make all consequential decisions to give effect to and implement the position statement.

88. 26/00018 - Prioritisation of Definitive Map Modification Applications
(Item 12)

Georgia Foster (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities) and Graham Rusling (Head of PROW CL&VGS and Access) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Foster presented the following:

- a) The Committee was informed that, over the past five years, the Public Rights of Way (PROW) team had been addressing a significant backlog of applications.

- b) A backlog had arisen following a surge in map modification applications, largely driven by public uncertainty linked to legislative changes and government policy regarding cut-off dates for recording historic rights of way.
- c) It was explained if applications continued to be processed strictly in order of receipt, it could take a further six to eight years to clear the backlog.
- d) The Committee was advised that a change in approach was recommended, whereby priority would be given to applications supported by user evidence, such as witness statements and first-hand accounts, rather than those based solely on historical documentation.

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

- a) Members supported the proposed change in approach and agreed that prioritising applications with user evidence was appropriate. Queries were raised on how many applications were triggered by the one-year rule and sought clarification on how this mechanism was being used in practice to accelerate the processing of applications.
- b) Officers advised that, although the provision to request accelerated processing via the Planning Inspectorate had been in place for some time, it was rarely utilised by individuals or organisation and that this was likely due to confidence in the Council's ongoing progress in addressing applications. However, a small number of such requests were received, and on occasion the Secretary of State instructed the authority to prioritise specific applications.
- c) The Committee asked whether footpaths that had been in continuous use for over 20 years could be determined immediately upon application. Members were advised that such applications would still enter the existing process and remain within the backlog, rather than being determined immediately. However, the revised approach aimed to improve operational efficiency and fairness by enabling applications supported by evidence to be progressed more promptly.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

- a) **APPROVE** the changes to the Statement of Priorities for Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) applications.
- b) **DELEGATE** to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services to implement the approved amendment to the Statement of Priorities for Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) applications, including:
 - giving effect to the amended statement in operational practice.
 - making any minor, non-material drafting or presentational changes required to ensure clarity and accuracy; and

- issuing associated guidance or communications necessary to support consistent application of the amended priorities

89. 26/00017 - Adoption of Gypsy and Traveller Site Pitch Allocation Policy Amendments
(Item 13)

Georgia Foster (Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services), Stephanie Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities) and Natalie Liddiard (Head of Gypsy Roma Traveller Resident Service) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Foster presented the Following:

- a) Advised that the current policy had last been updated in 2023, with the revised version following a public consultation had received a limited response.
- b) Members noted that KCC owned, provided, managed and maintained seven sites across Kent. The refreshed policy had been clarified for applicants, with a small number of amendments introduced to align with housing allocation processes used by borough and district councils.

2. No questions were raised on the decision; Members endorsed the proposed decision.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision, namely:

- a) ADOPT the Gypsy and Traveller Site Pitch Allocation Policy 2026
- b) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities to take all relevant actions and decisions necessary for its implementation, where such changes do not alter the intent of the policy and do not require further Member decision-making.
- c) DELEGATE authority to the Director of Growth & Communities or other officer (as authorised through the Council's Scheme of Delegation) as required to review the policy on an annual basis and revise the policy where changes do not require additional governance.

90. Work Programme
(Item 14)

The work programme was noted.

