

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 18 September 2013.

PRESENT: Mrs S V Hohler (Chairman), Mr M J Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A D Allen (Substitute for Mr C R Pearman), Mr C W Caller (Substitute for Mrs P Brivio), Mr B E Clark, Mr T Gates, Mr T A Maddison, Mr B Neaves, Mr M J Northey, Mr C Simkins, Mrs P A V Stockell (Substitute for Mrs M E Crabtree), Mr A Terry, Mr M A Wickham and Mrs Z Wiltshire

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms M Anthony (Commissioning and Development Manager), Ms J Barclay (Commissioning & Development Manager), Mr M Burrows (Director of Communications & Engagement), Mr D Crilley (Director of Community Cultural Services), Mr R Fitzgerald (Performance Manager), Ms J Hansen (Finance Business Partner BSS), Mr T Harwood (Senior Emergency Planning Officer), Ms A Honey (Corporate Director, Customer and Communities), Ms G Price (Commissioning Team Manager), Mr G Rusling (Public Rights of Way Operations Manager), Mr D Shipton (Acting Head of Financial Strategy), Mr S Terry (Emergency Planning Manager) and Mrs L Whitaker (Principal Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

8. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 June 2013

(Item A4)

(1) Mr Maddison stated that, further to Minute 4 (6) registration of births and deaths at libraries he had met with Cath Anley, Head of Service for Libraries, Registration and Archives and had been very impressed with the facilities he had seen and the work undertaken by the team.

(2) RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2013 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

9. Portfolio Holder's and Corporate Director's (Oral update)

(Item A5)

(1) The Cabinet Member referred to the Troubled Families programme. He described it as a programme which was high on the political agenda, both nationally and locally. Ms Honey, Corporate Director of Customer and Communities spoke about a conference that had taken place on the 9th July 2013 which had been attended by over 400 managers and practitioners and at which Louise Casey, Director General at the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and lead on the Troubled Families Programme, had endorsed the work being undertaken by Kent County Council. The Council had committed to working with over 2000 families and had appointed lead workers in

order that every family would have one named worker. Ms Honey urged that the Troubled Families Programme should not be viewed as a pilot scheme but that it should and would be integrated as part of the Council's core business

- (2) Mr Hill spoke about the Integrated Youth Service; he stated that a substantive report would be brought to the December Cabinet Committee meeting on the transformation of Youth Services when more detailed information would be available. Figures for the first quarter were encouraging and the newly commissioned providers had settled in well with all 47 of them now operational. Progress had been made in the major refurbishment of the youth hubs in Tonbridge and Folkestone and these would be completed by the end of September. Good progress had also been made in Deal. Difficulties continued in Tunbridge Wells, but temporary facilities for the delivery of services had been found, and work towards a permanent solution continued. He asked Ms Honey to provide for the Committee, details of the work of Kent Integrated Adolescent Support Service (KIASS)

Ms Honey explained that KIASS was a process bringing together Council services for adolescents, first across the County Council and then moving toward working with partners to provide a more streamlined and integrated system for users. Pilots were underway and making good progress and adolescent work formed a key building block in the Transformation: Facing the Challenge paper that was on the agenda for the full Council meeting the next day.

- (3) Mr Hill announced that in August Turner Contemporary had received its millionth visitor and that, to celebrate this milestone 20 Nebuchadnezzar of champagne had been produced. He expressed his satisfaction that a million visitors had been received in just over two years and described this as an extraordinary success.
- (4) Building on the success of Turner Contemporary he spoke of the design by Guy Holloway for the Rendezvous site in Margate. The launch had been held at Turner Contemporary and he was sure that the planned hotel would be a valuable asset for all partners
- (5) Ms Honey continued on the cultural theme, stating that the Council's UK City of Culture 2017 bid had not been successful. She said that the bid had been very strong and emphasised that preparation of the bid had created a legacy that would be built on in the future, as all the organisations from across East Kent had come together to work on the bid. The partnerships created would be continued. In response to a question, Mr Crilley informed Members that Hull, Leicester and Swansea had been shortlisted
- (6) Comments were received congratulating the Turner Gallery on its success and it was suggested that in the future a report on the benefits realised would be welcomed. Reports were received of the good cultural work going on elsewhere in the County, in particular, several recent festivals. Mr Hill confirmed that a new exhibition at Turner Contemporary was due to start in October. It was the Turner, Gainsborough and Constable exhibition which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in London, where it had been very well received

- (7) Mr Hill stated that one of the main planks of the Olympic campaign, which had started in 2005 and continued until 2012, had been the creation of lasting positive outcomes for Kent. The Legacy Plan had been launched in March of this year, at the same time as the Volunteering Charter. A small Cross-Directorate Cabinet Committee had been set up to govern the Legacy Plan and, six months in, the progress reports were very good. The Kent School Games were now firmly embedded as a core part of the County Council's activities and would continue every second year for the foreseeable future. 30,000 young people now took part in 35 sports and the majority of the schools in Kent now participated.
- (8) Mr Hill reported that Government money and grants had been secured as part of the Legacy Plan, with £2m from the Places People Play Sports Programme and almost £1m from the Schools Funding Forum for school sports. Kent Greeters continued to do good work across many venues in the County. He had asked officers that a report be brought to the March meeting of the Cabinet Committee with details of the Legacy Plan one year after its launch and the progress that had been achieved.
8. Touching briefly on the Transformation Plan, Mr Hill stated that it would affect the Communities Directorate which delivered a large number of small services and that these would be reviewed to ensure that they were delivered in the most efficient and effective ways.

Comments were received from members of the Committee as follows:

Mr Neaves reported that he had visited the Folkestone Youth Hub and that young people there were positive about the work being done on their behalf.

Mr Maddison welcomed the work reported on the Olympic Legacy. Mr Clarke also commented on this matter, he believed that more work might be undertaken to communicate the legacy more widely. Mr Burrows, Director of Communications and Engagement responded. He reported that a communications plan had been in place to deliver news about the legacy when new initiatives took place, in addition work had been undertaken with schools.

8. Social Fund Localisation: Kent Support & Assistance Service (KSAS)

(Item B1 – Mel Anthony, Commissioning & Development Manager, was in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member and Corporate Director seeking endorsement of, or comments on, the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member to extend the Kent Support and Assistance Service for another year.

The Cabinet Member introduced the new service, for individuals experiencing crisis, which the Council had taken over from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and explained that it was now delivered differently. Specifically, cash awards were no longer made, except in certain very limited circumstances. He reported that this service was established as a one-year pilot with the intention of then procuring for a long term service. However, there was not considered to be sufficient information available as yet with which to draw up a comprehensive specification for delivery and

hence it was proposed that the pilot be extended to collect that information and enable a properly conducted procurement exercise.

Ms Anthony spoke to the item. She reported the following information for the Committee:

- (i) That the Council had chosen to not only meet the immediate needs of those presenting by awarding goods and food, rather than money, but was also attempting to identify the cause of the problems being experienced and signpost individuals to services that may help them to avoid further crisis in the future.
- (ii) She stated that there had been approx 11,000 telephone enquiries in the first five months of the scheme. The total number of applications received had been 3,483 resulting in 1,817 households receiving 2,921 individual awards. The remainder had been signposted to other more appropriate services. Food was the most commonly sought assistance and KCC worked closely with a large supermarket to provide balanced food packages.
- (iii) The service had linked with voluntary organisations and other departments and programmes within the council to ensure joined up delivery,
- (iv) That KCC's delivery was innovative and several other local authorities had been in contact to discuss how things were progressing in Kent with a view to amending their own delivery.
- (v) The scheme continued to evolve but there had been positive feedback from stakeholders and users and successful outcomes for residents, including one case which she described in more detail.

Ms Anthony concluded by reiterating the points made by Mr Hill, explaining that in order to allow a robust procurement the Committee was being asked to endorse the proposed decision that the pilot be extended for a further year until 31 March 2015 to allow more evidence to be gathered. The short time the service had been in place and the fact that it had not been in operation over a winter period meant that the current data was insufficient to allow a properly informed procurement process.

The Committee debated the report received. A member of the Committee expressed concern about the number of enquiries that were received compared with the number of grants awarded. The Chairman responded that she regarded that as a success of the new scheme as help was targeted and appropriate, but that monitoring would continue to ensure that all those that needed help received it.

In response to further questions put, Ms Anthony confirmed the following information:

- (i) That the service was a building block for those who made contact and that the focus was not only to address the immediate need but also to signpost applicants to services to help them cope with and manage their situation in the future. All of those who had been unsuccessful in receiving an award would have been directed to more appropriate services, such as a DWP budgeting loan.
- (ii) That ASDA was the supermarket that currently provided the food parcels and West Kent Lifeways were the arm of the furniture re-use sector that provided white goods.

- (iii) That the food parcels came as a 7 day package as standard and these were delivered direct to the service user. This 7 day period was sufficient to put other services in place and look for permanent solution to the problem(s).
- (iv) Households were allowed three awards in a 12 month period.
- (v) Applications could be made by email or by a freephone number to operators who were trained to deal with calls for the service. In addition, work continued with partners such as Children's Centres to allow applications from a variety of avenues.
- (vi) That other supermarkets were not currently expressing an interest in delivering the service but were watching the success of the scheme with interest and may be confident enough to bid when the full procurement exercise was conducted.

Further comments were received from members:

- (vii) A member of the Committee expressed concern that some elected members had not been made aware of the work of the service. He asked that more information be disseminated to members in order that they could properly inform residents who approached them in need.
- (viii) That linking with the DWP in order to negate the need for people to give personal details more than once might make the service more user friendly.
- (ix) That families who had not eaten for some time would need food more quickly than the 24-48 hours that delivery could currently take. In addition, vouchers for ASDA were not practical for every family as for some people ASDA would be some distance from home.
- (x) That research should be undertaken with local food banks to find out why some residents approach them instead of the council in order to make more accessible the service that the council delivers

Briefly Ms Anthony responded to thank members for their helpful questions and comments and to clarify that food awards were delivered to families as parcels, vouchers were not used and that some emergency long life food parcels were kept aside for those cases where families were in such need that they could not wait for the supermarket to pack and deliver the parcel.

Finally she reported that a full report would be brought back to the Cabinet Committee in March. Communication with Members about the service prior to this report would be conducted via the Member Information Bulletin.

It was RESOLVED that: the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member to extend the one-year pilot scheme by twelve months to 31 March 2015 be endorsed.

9. Fees to be charged in respect of applications made under the Commons (Registration of Town or Village Greens) and Dedicated Highways (Landowner Statements and Declarations) (England) Regulations 2013

(Item B2 – Graham Rusling, Public Rights of Way and Service Access Manager, was in attendance for this item)

- (1) The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member and Corporate Director seeking endorsement of, or comments on, the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member to agree the fees to be charged in respect of applications made under The Commons (Registration of Town or Village Greens) and

Dedicated Highways (Landowner Statements and Declarations) (England) Regulations 2013.

- (2) The Cabinet Member introduced the report stating that a change in regulations meant that the County Council could now charge landowners a fee for processing applications designed to protect landowners' interests. In establishing a fee for the administration of applications the County Council could recover its reasonable costs and the Committee's approval was sought to the scale of fees to be charged
- (3) In response to a question about whether fees were typical Mr Rusling explained that Kent was the first Council to bring forward a decision of this kind. He would be attending a meeting with colleagues from the south of England later in the week where he would be able to find out more about how other authorities planned to move forward.
- (4) Members agreed that the fees seemed reasonable and, further to a suggestion on providing an estimate for landowners with a large amount of land, endorsed the proposed decision. Mr Rusling stated that this was something that could be investigated.

It was RESOLVED that: the proposed decision of the Cabinet Member to introduce fees to be charged in respect to applications made under the Commons (Registration of Town or Village Greens) and Dedicated Highways (Landowner Statements and Declarations) (England) Regulations 2013, as set out in the report, be endorsed.

10. Customer & Communities Performance Dashboard

(Item C1 – Richard Fitzgerald, Performance Manager, Business Strategy & Support was in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report of the Cabinet Member and Corporate Director detailing the progress by the Directorate against targets set in business plans for Key Performance Indicators.

- (1) Mr Hill introduced the report by congratulating officers on good performance and in particular the improvements reported in the Contact Centre, including the increased number of residents using the website to contact the council..
- (2) Mr Fitzgerald informed Members that the Dashboard was a standard report to the Cabinet Committee and this was the first report for the financial year 2013-14. Members had been consulted on the development of the indicators that would be used this year through the business planning process. Members who had previously been on the Committee would note that as requested eBooks had been included in the Libraries section and some data on Troubled Families had also been included which would be expanded as the Programme developed and moved forward.

The Kent Support and Assistance Service which had been discussed earlier in the meeting would be added to future reports. This would allow the outcomes of what happened to those people who made a request but did not receive an award to be monitored

(3) Mr Fitzgerald explained that for the first time Corporate Complaints for the whole Council had been pulled together and transferred to the Communities Directorate. Each service was still responsible for responding to its own complaints so the indicator was not specifically a reflection of Customer and Communities but of the whole Council.

(4) Speaking about variance and changes in the indicators Mr Fitzgerald reported that library visits and book issues had been red but the targets had been very ambitious when set. A more realistic target had been set for this year thus giving a more accurate expectation and better performance results

(5) Integrated Youth Service indicators had also shown improvement.

(6) Officers responded to comments and questions from Members on the Dashboard and the following points were highlighted:-

- The low input from the Big Society Fund compared with previous years was based on only quarter one figures and were on track to be close to last year's figures for the full year.
- That feedback received regarding Commissioned services and service improvement indicators being removed at the behest of central government would be carefully considered.
- That changes to targets considered to be too high or too low had been, and would continue to be, reported back to the Committee
- That satisfaction scores would be considered further to establish any trends. As a general rule dissatisfaction was related to the policy rather than the service received.
- Crime figures were tracked quarterly. If an increase or decrease were shown for two or three quarters this would be considered to form a trend.

(7) RESOLVED that the report and comments made by Members and Officers be noted.

11. Kent Drug & Alcohol Action Team Deep Dive (KDAAT)

(Item C2 – Jessica Barclay, Commissioning & Development Manager and Gaby Price, Commissioning Officer were in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report providing an overview of substance misuse services commissioned by Kent County Council.

(1) Ms Honey introduced the report. She welcomed the opportunity to discuss the service with the Committee as it was a particularly significant service for the Council where spending exceeded £19m. The services are delivered by commissioned organisations; the Council identified the needs relating to drugs and alcohol across the County and commissioned the necessary services to meet those needs, both for adults and for young people.

(2) Ms Honey reported that she was the Chairman of the Drug and Alcohol Board, which was a multi-agency board with representation from the key partners including the Police, Probation and Health as well as internal partners, Education and Specialist Children's Services. KDAAT was a high performing team and that they were recognised as such nationally.

(3) Ms Barclay drew the following information to the attention of the committee:

- (i) That investment was predominately from Public Health with contributions from KCC, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Probation and over 30 methods of intervention being delivered by three providers. Treatment of offenders was also part of the Kent delivery with treatment services for this group being delivered by a fourth provider.
- (ii) That it was hoped that levels of funding would remain at similar levels despite planned changes for the future delivery of such services.

Drug misuse treatment

- (iii) That just under 25% of the drug users currently accessing the service were currently injecting drugs and this was relevant in terms of preventative work related to the health and well being of users, and control of blood borne viruses.
- (iv) That a significant portion of service users had a dual diagnosis, ie they were also referred to mental health services with issues unrelated to their drug use.
- (v) That the largest cohort of the clients in treatment were white British males in their 20s and 30s.
- (vi) Many clients had further difficulties, in particular in relation to housing.

Alcohol misuse treatment

- (vii) Alcohol misuse clients showed a similar ethnicity make up to those with drug misuse problems, but were significantly older. In addition there were more people in this group with a dual diagnosis and more living with their children.

Prison Services

- (viii) Services in prisons mirrored those in the community. This group of service users was more ethnically diverse than those being treated in the community.

General

- (ix) Fewer young people were misusing either drugs or alcohol, owing to a successful education programme allowing young people to make more informed decisions.
- (x) Treatment was based on recovery and abstinence models and included not only the user, but their families.
- (xi) A pilot has been tested in East Kent based on a payment by results model for the provider and incentivisation models were likely to be rolled out further. Commissioning in this way ensured that outcomes were the focus of service delivery.
- (xii) Performance results were expected to improve further in the next financial year, following a period of disruption and transformation due to two new service contracts, which had affected both results and reporting. Measured against other DAATs in the country, Kent continued to perform well - 4th out of 149.

(4) Officers responded to comments and questions from Members on the Deep Dive and the following points were highlighted:-

- Successful planned exits meant that users had been abstinent for 12 weeks combined with a clinical judgement that the client was no longer clinically dependent on the substance.
- In relation to commissioning and payments for outcomes, Kent was part of the national Payment by Results pilot. There were 8 pilot sites across the UK testing an outcome based Payment by Results model, these were all very different and were being evaluated as they went on. The contract for West Kent was £4m. When the model was chosen it was designed with increasing increments of payment by results each year.
- That the Drug and Alcohol Board was concerned with the transition period from childhood to adulthood and through careful commissioning it aimed to ensure a seamless service so that young people were not left vulnerable.
- That much preventative work was done in partnership with Kent Council on Addiction (KCA), the Council's main youth service provider, and anti-drug demonstration kits such as a training model and toolkit called RisKit. All adult service providers worked in partnership with KCA to further strengthen the transition work from child to adulthood. The adult provider for East Kent is Turning Point and for West Kent it is the Crime Reduction Initiative (CRI).

(5) RESOLVED that the information on KDAAT and Members' comments be noted.

12. Customer & Communities Quarter 1 Monitoring

(Item C3 – Jackie Hansen, Finance Business Partner BSS and Jane Gibbons, Principal Accountant - Central Co-ordination Team were in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member and Director providing budget monitoring information for the first quarter of the 2013/14 financial year.

(1) Ms Honey stated that the Communities Directorate was projecting a small underspend of £140,000 against its cash limit. There were two reasons for this variation. The first was KSAS, as a new service, was projecting a significant underspend against the value of the awards. Currently the forecast underspend was £592,000 but this could change during the course of the year, especially as future government funding for this scheme was unknown. A commitment had been made that any underspend for this year would be rolled forward into next year and ring fenced for the scheme.

(2) The second reason was in relation to the Contact Centre. Within the plan for this year a target of £575,000 in savings had been identified, not just from Customer and Communities but through the Channel Shift, which would be covered later on in the agenda. The savings were expected from across the Council but, due to procurement of systems to implement the transformation, the savings were unlikely to be met this year. Customer and Communities had agreed to try and find alternative savings to offset this as a one off. After a balancing exercise was conducted it left the £140,000 underspend reported.

(3) Officers responded to comments and questions from Members on the projected underspend and reiterated that any underspend this year had been ring fenced for the following year and that this action would require savings to be found elsewhere in order to avoid overspending on the budget. That the money was not at risk if it was not spent this year.

- (4) RESOLVED that the Revenue and Capital forecast variances from the budget based on the first full quarter's monitoring be noted.

13. Medium Term Financial Outlook

(Item C4 – Dave Shipton, Head of Financial Strategy was in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member and Director containing for consideration funding estimates for the next four years and implications for KCC's financial planning. The report also included information on two key government consultations launched over the summer and the likely timetable for setting the 2014/15 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan

The Chairman introduced Mr Shipton and commented on the scale of the challenge ahead for local government and the further savings that would need to be made owing to impending reductions in funding.

(1) Mr Shipton reported that owing to the current uncertainties regarding funding the budget consultation, which had gone out in September 2012, would not happen before November this year. However, he emphasised that it was important to engage early with Cabinet Committees to ensure awareness and encourage debate and discussion. The new funding arrangements were extremely complicated and although baseline indications provided a good guide, this would not be confirmed until December.

(2) The paper gave details of the position for 2014-15 and 2015-16. 2014-15 was very much as had been anticipated and published in the Medium Term Financial Plan. 2015-16, however, looked much more challenging than had previously been anticipated with a likely 13% reduction in core funding, although some monies would transfer to new streams delivering programmes such as "Troubled Families".

(3) The Chairman asked Mr Shipton to expand on the thinking behind New Homes Bonus (NHB) and money transferring to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Mr Shipton explained that this would be applied to all tiers of local government and that the government was committed to moving £400m from the NHB budget, a 35% reduction, with consultation taking place regarding how this 35% reduction was split between contributions from the upper tier and lower tier authorities .

(4) If KCC lost all its NHB monies this would result in an estimated £8m loss by 2015-16 whereas a pro rata share would mean an estimated £2.83m loss. The consultation was due to close the day after the meeting and indications were that a number of people had responded negatively to the suggestion, claiming that the government should rethink the principle of top slicing the NHB. It had only been introduced two years before as a way of incentivising local authorities to grant planning for new homes and the possibility of such a substantial change after such a short time and when many authorities, including Kent, had entered into commitments with NHB monies raised concerns about future spending plans.

(6) Comments and questions were received from Members and the following points were highlighted:-

- The current NHB was used to fund general services but for the future it had been earmarked for specific developments in the Thames Gateway, namely for transport and infrastructure improvements.
- That the Committee was welcome to receive a list of statutory duties should it wish but that it might not be as helpful as desired as the level to which statutory duties must be delivered was subject to interpretation in some areas.
- It was important to assess the impact of any reductions in funding for additional and follow-on costs that may occur if services had been reduced. The Transformation process was an attempt to do things differently so that savings could be made without loss of service.
- Customer and Communities had historically been successful at securing funding from outside sources, with up to 50% of the budget being funded this way. If more money could be secured like this it could alleviate pressures.

(7) It was RESOLVED that the potential implications on future funding settlement, the Council's Budget/Medium Term Financial Plan and the likely timetable for setting the 2014/15 budget be noted.

14. Ash Dieback – Update

(Item D1 – Steve Terry, Emergency Planning Manager and Tony Harwood, Senior Emergency Planning Officer were in attendance for this item)

The Committee received a report from the Cabinet Member and Director detailing the Council and its partners response to the Ash Dieback outbreak

(1) The Chairman introduced the report stating that Kent was leading the way on this issue. The Cabinet Committee had previously expressed concern about Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) particularly where Ash trees grew along public footpaths and highways and the potential problems that could arise from this. Mr Hill added that Emergency Planning had performed extremely well and to date was taking a national lead on this topic.

(2) The Ash Dieback outbreak first came to the Council's attention in the autumn of 2012 and was an 'emergency' as defined by the Civil Contingency Act 2004, the statutory piece of legislation which Emergency Planning worked to, and which covered "any situation which threatens serious damage to the environment".

(3) In Denmark 95% of Ash trees had succumbed to infection, not all had died and the disease was being closely monitored. Kent had the highest number of outbreaks in the open environment in the UK, followed by East Anglia. There were currently some 45 confirmed infection sites in Kent. The Forestry Commission believed that Ash Dieback was now endemic in East Kent.

(4) Emergency Planning had been working with the Forestry Commission and Defra to understand the outbreaks and quantify the risks involved. Major inroads had been made at both a policy and a political level and Kent had been asked by the Local Government Association to lead on Ash Dieback nationally, in recognition of the work that had been undertaken.

(5) Mr Harwood explained that the main change since the Committee had been updated at its March meeting was that Kent was now proactively working to manage the outbreak. When initial news of this pathogenic outbreak had been received, Emergency Planning had been in a reactive phase. Links with Defra had been fostered and strengthened and there were very good working links with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science, Lord De Mauley, in relation to this work.

(6) In October a stakeholder event would be held to launch a bespoke Kent Management Plan for the response to Ash Dieback. The Management Plan would demarcate the main outbreak zones. Working within these outbreak zones with organisations such as utility companies, the Highways Agency and with arboricultural workers, prescriptive guidance would be laid down regarding bio-security measures.

(7) Officers responded to comments and questions from Members on Ash Dieback and the following points were highlighted:-

- That although the spores may theoretically have blown in from Continental Europe, local spread of the pathogen by human interventions was the focus of biosecurity measures as this was easier to address than airborne spread. Spread could be slowed by relatively simple measures such as not moving leaf litter or leafy brush. Potentially infective plant material could continue to be moved around, but only within infected areas - not across borders between infected and non-infected areas.
- Tetrad surveys reveal that the majority of Ash trees in Kent were not in open countryside but rather in urban and urban edge areas.
- That the Ash Dieback threat was potentially costly. When any highways works were carried out a 'lane hire' fee was required, to close off a road. If this work was undertaken during the day this cost £800 per site. Coupled with the fact that KCC had approximately 20,000 Ash street trees the cost implications could be millions of pounds. Emergency Planning officers were in discussions with government to ensure that procedures were streamlined or circumvented where possible to ensure that time and money were not wasted.
- The Bellwin Scheme offered emergency financial assistance to local authorities after a set sum had been met by the authority. For KCC this monetary sum was £3m. However, the estimated cost for street trees alone in Kent could be as high as £16m. Bellwin was usually applied to flooding and other emergencies caused by severe weather, but applications had been made during the Foot and Mouth outbreaks.

(8) RESOLVED that:

- (a) the potential level of threat that Ash Dieback poses to public safety and the environment and the economy of Kent be noted;
- (b) the KCC and wider-partnership approach outlined within this report be endorsed; and
- (c) the Cabinet Committee be kept informed of progress.

15. Customer Services - Channel Shift - Presentation

(Item D2)

- Mr Borrows, Director of Communications and Engagement and Mr Crilley, Director of Customer Services Customer & Communities

(1) Mr Burrows explained that Channel Shift was about moving people from face to face and telephone contact to conducting business and finding out about the Council's services and information online. To this end, the Council's website was currently undergoing a re-design process to make it more customer-focussed and easier to navigate.

(2) Mobile access and contact was growing in all sectors, and within all demographics and there had been a 35% increase in access to the Council's website in the first quarter of this year against the same period last year.

(3) Mr Crilley gave the following statistics about the number of visits/contacts and the cost of these as an indication of progress made.

Website visits www.kent.gov.uk	Gateway visits	Calls answered
4.3 million	950,000	921,000
13p	£12.27	£4.20

(4) Calls to the Blue Badge scheme in August 2013 had gone down by 44% and online & card payments were currently doubling each month. This was resulting in more badges being issued, less customer waiting time and increased satisfaction.

(5) Officers responded to comments and questions from Members on Channel Shift and the following points were highlighted:-

- Although maximising the focus towards online contact was desirable, members were assured that there would always be other options available to those who wanted it.
- That the increase in online reporting of highways issues had been the result of a wider publicity campaign than in previous year. Statistics show that calls were reduced and satisfaction increased as a result.
- That the Contact Centre currently used 26 different systems to conduct its work, which were not linked or integrated. It was planned that a more integrated Customer Manager System would be agreed and in place within the next year.

It was RESOLVED that the information received be noted.

The Chairman, Mrs Hohler, closed the meeting and requested that members bring forward topics of interest for the Deep Dive item before the next agenda setting meeting in December.