

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 17 January 2020.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers, Mr S Holden, Mrs R Binks, Mr D S Daley, Mr A H T Bowles, Mr D L Brazier, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr A Cook, Mr D Farrell, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr G Lymer, Mr S C Manion and Mr J Wright

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE and Mr M Whiting

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

201. Membership

(Item 2)

The Chairman announced that Mr McInroy had replaced Mrs Beresford as a Member of the Committee.

202. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr J McInroy.

203. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 4)

There were no declarations of interest received.

204. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2019

(Item 5)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2019 are a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

205. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 6)

1. Mr M Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) provided an update on the following:

- (a) On Monday 2 December, the law that permitted same-sex couples to enter into a civil partnership was extended to mixed-sex couples and on 31 December 2019 the first heterosexual civil ceremony in Kent was conducted at Wellington House Registration Office. The couple's story was included with others on the BBC news website. Further information could be found on the following [link](#).
 - (b) The 2019 Turner Prize was presented to all four nominees at an award ceremony at Dreamland Margate, after the judges received a collective statement requesting that all four finalists be awarded the Turner Prize. Mr Hill commended the success of the event and the considerable number of visitors, making it one of the most visited Turner Prize exhibitions of all time since the Prize was established.
 - (a) The first phase of work for the Turner Contemporary Capital Project had started and would be completed within five weeks. Phase 2 of the refurbishment project was due to start in September 2020.
 - (b) The new polymer £20 note was due to be launched on 20 February 2020 and would feature the artist JMW Turner as well as scenes of Margate including the Turner Contemporary.
2. Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) provided an update on the following:
- (a) Kent County Council (KCC) had been working closely with its neighbouring European counterparts and hosted a meeting on 22 October 2019 in Maidstone between senior elected Members and officials from the Hauts-de-France region, Nord and Pas-de-Calais 'departments' (France) and the provinces of West Flanders (Belgium) and Zeeland (the Netherlands) to ensure cross-border cooperation on topics of mutual interest. The first Thames Estuary Envoy (Kate Willard) had also been appointed and acting as the advocate for the region, she had been appointed Chair of the Thames Estuary Growth Board to forge positive relationships with local businesses, communities and local authorities and would be working with the Government to increase prosperity across the Thames Gateway area. Mr Whiting along with a number of Kent Business Leaders and Education Leaders would be attending a Summit in France on Wednesday 5 February 2020 to formalise the establishment of the Straits Committee.
 - (b) The Kent Excellence in Business Awards (KEiBA) which was an annual awards scheme staged and produced by KM Media Group and Kent County Council to recognise and reward excellence in Kent's businesses was in its 12th year. Mr Whiting advocated Kent County

Council's ongoing commitment to Kent businesses to help them grow and prosper and said that the KEiBA awards was an important way of encouraging businesses to promote themselves and achieve international growth and recognition. Mr Whiting asked that Members of the Committee promote the award and encourage interested businesses to apply online using the following [link](#).

- (c) The third Kent Business Summit, hosted by the Kent Business School, was held on Friday 10 January 2020 at the University of Kent and was attended by over 400 business leaders, local government decision-makers and academic experts. The event focused its attention on tackling regional challenges and innovative forward-thinking to ensure sustainable economic growth.
 - (d) The Government had announced that the decision on the Manston Development Consent Order had been delayed by four months.
 - (e) The No Use Empty Scheme which brought over 6000 properties back into use since its introduction had secured £12m of KCC Treasury Funds to help developers transform derelict and vacant sites into new residential units. The scheme would deliver a 1.5% return per annum on investment. A bid for £2m had been submitted to the Growing Places Fund to bring empty commercial properties back into use.
3. The Cabinet Members responded to comments and questions as follows:
- (a) Mr Hill confirmed that the work required at Sandwich Station to support the Open Golf tournament was on track to be delivered on time and on budget.
 - (b) Mr Whiting informed Members that the discussions between KCC and Kate Willard (Thames Estuary Envoy) were primarily around KCC's priorities for new infrastructure. No discussions had taken place on the topic of Manston airport.
 - (c) In response to queries relating to the UK Investment Fund which a previous Government had announced to replace the EU grant system, Mr Whiting said that no details had yet been given but agreed to share any feedback around the shared prosperity fund with the Committee at a future date.
 - (d) Mr Whiting informed Members that the purpose of the Straits Committee was to ensure collaborative working. France's local authorities continued to be heavily involved in the meetings. The work of the Straits Committee was supported by the British Embassy in Paris.

4. It was resolved that the verbal update be noted, with thanks.

206. The Kent Developers Group

(Item 7)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development), Nick Fenton (Chairman, Kent Developers Group) and Brian Horton (Co-opted Member, Kent Housing Group Executive Board & Housing Advisor, SELEP), were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report that outlined the work of the Kent Developers Group (KDG).
2. Mr Fenton and Mr Horton addressed the Committee and highlighted the key objectives, achievements and future challenges that were to be faced by the KDG as it continued to improve its relationship with District Councils in order to deliver quality assured infrastructure and affordable housing.
3. Mr Fenton and Mr Horton responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) With regard to the protection of great crested newts, Mr Fenton informed Committee Members that the KDG had worked with Natural England and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on safeguarding important environmental habits. The new streamlined approach ensured that both housing developments and habitat environments were strategically planned.
 - (b) In response to concerns regarding the membership of the Kent Developers Group, Mr Fenton assured the Committee that both officers and Members had attended meetings. Meetings were held at venues across the county and Members of the Committee would be welcome.
 - (c) Mr Fenton responded to Members concerns regarding the training opportunities highlighted in Commitment 2 of the Planning Protocol and clarified that this was not the statutory training that planners delivered to Council Members. The training opportunities referred to in the Planning Protocol was in regard to joint working opportunities with developers and other bodies (including elected Members) to build capacity and promote a common understanding of issues, approaches and good practice.

- (d) In response to Members' concerns over the diminution of commercial space, Mr Fenton commented on the issues around Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and the dichotomy of government objectives to provide both commercial space and affordable housing. Mr Horton assured Members that both the Kent Developers Group and Kent Housing Group were keen to support the infrastructure first concept and said that representations had been made to Government regarding its ambition to deliver homes and the requirements of what would be needed to deliver those in a sustainable way to ensure good growth.
- (e) Mr Horton commented on the points raised in relation to affordable housing and recognised the unintended implications as a result of PDR which had placed a strain on a number of communities where vulnerable people from outside of Kent were being placed into Kent accommodation. Mr Horton recognised that this was not a situation unique to Kent and again, a number of representations had been made to Government to ensure that developers were building homes in the right places and to the correct quality assured specification. Mr Horton informed Members that the vast majority of new homes developed under the affordable housing scheme were let through Kent's Homechoice (the partnership of Local Authorities and Housing Associations) and assured Members that those homes were offered to local people and not those from outside areas.
- (f) Mr Smith assured Members that Kent County Council followed strict guidelines and procedures in relation to planning applications.
- (g) Mr Fenton agreed to circulate the details of the Kent Developers Group to all Members of the Committee.

4. It was RESOLVED that the contents of the report, be noted.

207. Draft Capital Programme 2020-23 and Revenue Budget 2020-21
(Item 8)

Kevin Tilson (Finance Business Partner for Growth, Environment and Transport) was in attendance for this item.

- 1. Mr Tilson introduced the report that set out the Draft Budget proposals for 2020-21 which were published on 6 January 2020. The Draft Budget took account of the response to the consultation and engagement campaign and provided Members of the Committee with the opportunity to comment on the Draft Budget proposals and suggest any changes which should be

made before the draft was presented to Cabinet on 27 January 2020 and to full County Council on 13 February 2020.

2. The officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) In response to comments regarding the new Trading Standards posts and whether these were a direct result of the recommendations put forward by the Select Committee on Knife Crime in Kent, Mr Tilson informed Members that the posts had been created to analyse business intelligence around serious and organised crime which covered a number of elements that fell within other Cabinet Committee remits due to the extensive nature of the post.
 - (b) With regard to the specified budget around knife crime, the Chairman agreed that the officer liaise directly with Members after the meeting to discuss details of the Draft Budget that fell outside the Committee's remit.
 - (c) The Committee considered whether to recommend removing the £71,000 for Trading Standards Officers from the Draft Budget. Upon being put to the vote by the Chairman, the motion fell.
3. It was RESOLVED that the Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets and Medium-Term Financial Plan, including the responses to the consultation and estimate of the government's funding settlement, be noted.

208. Library Registration and Archives Strategy Implementation Update *(Item 9)*

James Pearson (Head of service, Libraries, Registration & Archives) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) introduced the update report to Members which highlighted the progress that had been made to drive the Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) Strategy forward since its implementation in March 2019. Mr Hill commended the service on its ability to save £1m out of the LRA budget without causing significant disruption along with the successful implementation of reduced library opening times. Mr Hill paid further tribute to LRA for achieving a significant reduction in employees as a result of the revised library opening times, without the need for any compulsory redundancies.
2. Mr Pearson highlighted the key developments that would be delivered over the next year, including new LRA branding, a new mobile library vehicle and improved IT infrastructure. Mr Pearson also announced that the

Gravesend Library that had undergone urgent repair work was due to re-open on Monday 20 January 2020.

3. The officer responded to comments and questions as follows:

(a) In response to Members queries relating to the replacement of IT equipment and whether this would be recycled for use within other services/ external organisations, Mr Pearson agreed to liaise with the IT department and to circulate a response to Members in due course.

(b) Mr Pearson addressed Members comments regarding access to libraries outside of staffing hours and said that LRA had launched a new and consistent approach across the county as to how members of the public could access and utilise the library space outside of the core operating hours. However, Mr Pearson assured the Committee that LRA continued in its commitment to provide a safe, attractive and welcoming space for everyone's use and welcomed support from Members to promote and encourage residents to maximise the space available. Mr Pearson also referred to the Library Extra Pilot which utilised technology assisted opening to allow library customers (aged 16 and over) with a full membership card to access the library outside of staffed hours. Upon completion of the pilot period a strategy would be devised and gradually rolled out across the county to ensure consistency across all LRA services.

(c) In response to the anticipated time scale for the introduction of the new mobile library fleet, Mr Pearson confirmed that the first new vehicle was expected at the beginning of the next financial year (April 2020) and said that this would be announced in due course. Mr Pearson addressed comments relating to the environmental impact of the new vehicles and said that whilst it had not been possible to source an alternative fuel/ hybrid vehicle, a significant degree of work had been done in conjunction with Kent County Council's Sustainability and Highways Teams to ensure that the vehicles procured were as environmentally friendly as possible.

(d) Members commended Mr Pearson and the LRA staff for their achievements.

4. It was RESOLVED that the progress made in the delivery of the LRA strategy, be noted.

209. Work Programme 2020/21
(Item 10)

1. Mr Smith (Director of Economic Development) informed Committee Members that the planned district visits to Maidstone and Canterbury had been postponed due to the election period. Members would receive a revised list of dates ahead of the next Cabinet Committee.
2. It was RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted, subject to the inclusion of the following items:
 - (a) an update report on the consultation of the shared prosperity fund; and
 - (b) an update report on Faversham Creek bridge