

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held virtually on Microsoft Teams on Friday, 3 July 2020.

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

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Ross Gill (Associate Director of SQW), Mrs S Holt-Castle (Interim Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement), Matt Hyland (Executive Project Co-ordinator – East Kent Opportunities LLP), Rachel Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning – Performance & Analytics), Mr J Pearson (Service Improvement Programme Manager), Dafydd Pugh (Project Manager), Martyn Riley (Programme Manager, Business Investment), Mr D Smith (Director of Economic Development), Mrs A Hunter (Principal Democratic Services Officer) and Miss G Little (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

221. Membership

(Item 2)

The Committee noted that Mr Hook has replaced Mr Daley as a Member of the Committee.

222. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 3)

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr A Ridgers.

223. Protocols for Virtual Meetings

(Item 4)

It was RESOLVED that in order to facilitate the smooth working of its virtual meetings, the Committee agreed to adopt the Protocols for Virtual Meetings.

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

(Item 5)

There had been no declarations of interest received.

225. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020

(Item 6)

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020 are a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

226. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 7)

1. Mr M Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) provided an update to Members on the response of Community Services to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the following:

(a) Libraries, Registration and Archives

This service continued to work to the specific government unlocking timetable and had fully engaged corporate support from Health and Safety, Infrastructure and Communications. To date they had successfully:

- Restarted the home library service,
- Restarted record management service,
- Restarted face to face birth registrations on 17th June (which had a significant backlog; and
- Restarted notice of marriage appointments

The next step of the re-opening phase required a careful and programmed approach to ensure the health and safety of staff and public. This was due to start July with a basic offer comprising of a select and collect system for books and one hour of pre-booked IT access. The planned sequence of reopening to customers was as follows:

- From Monday 13th July KCC would open 12 libraries, one in each district with opening hours to the public from 10:00am to 4:00pm Monday to Saturday. The detailed list of libraries to be opened was included in the briefing note that Mr Hill sent to Members earlier in the week.
- In August, subject to confirmation and based on initial opening experience, KCC intended to open a further 12 libraries, again one in each district.
- Finally, in September, KCC hoped to open another handful of libraries to complete all its tier one and tier two libraries. Depending on the ability to staff buildings and the Council's reopening policy, KCC would then look at opening additional libraries.

Risk assessments had been completed for all the services that were operating or proposed to operate in the near future and had been

completed with the support of Health and Safety and Infrastructure. The appropriate PPE was in place.

Plans had also been put in place to support the potential return of the Archive Search Room at the Kent History and Library Centre in August. Mr Hill confirmed that the planned approach to Libraries was in-line with many local authorities who were taking a phased approach to reopening.

(b) **Wedding Ceremonies**

Wedding ceremonies were due to commence from 4th July in accordance with government guidelines. The maximum number of people able to attend a ceremony was 30 and this figure included staff, photographers etc. Due to social distancing measures, space limitations had been applied to all KCC venues.

(c) **Public Protection Group**

The Public Protection Group's alerts and messages to protect Kent residents and business from Covid scams successfully achieved a reach of over 3 million between 17th March and 8th June. On 16th June, Public Protection hosted a live on-line session to answer questions from businesses on reopening trading safely and had scheduled a further live session at 1.00 pm on 3rd July which was aimed specifically at the tourism and hospitality sector.

(d) **Community Wardens**

Community Wardens continued to work across the county and had supported 3,631 vulnerable people with food, prescriptions, advice and welfare support since the start of lockdown. They had also been working alongside local colleagues helping to ensure that the town centres and shops could safely reopen. They continued to respond to emergencies and had recently been involved in the Eastchurch landslide cliff collapse.

(e) **The Emergency Planning Team**

The Emergency Planning Team had arranged the donation, storage, quality assurance and distribution of over 100,000 items of PPE to support infection control. This generous gifting of much-needed equipment by local businesses, academic institutions and KCC staff was fundamental to ensuring that appropriate PPE was available to support KCC staff and care providers (including care homes) - especially when conventional supply chains were at their most challenged in late March and April.

(f) **Trading Standards**

Since the 23rd of March, Trading Standards had focused on dealing with Covid related issues and received 2,200 referrals of which 630 required action. These ranged from businesses overcharging for their goods, scammers selling fake goods, sanitiser safety concerns, social distancing complaints, fake PPE and prohibited shops trading.

As part of the World Customs Union activity to stop unsafe and counterfeit PPE putting users and patients at risk, Trading Standards had worked with the UK Border Force and the National Crime Agency to stop the importation of large quantities of illegal surgical masks , respirators and protective suits and the successful detention of over 130,000 illegal facemasks concealing £1 million pounds worth of cocaine. They had also established a referral system to offer support to care homes.

(g) **Kent Sport**

Kent Sport had successfully supported sports organisations to attract £750,000 of funding from the Sport England Community Emergency Fund and had provided 42 everyday active small grants. Sport England has also recently awarded Kent Sport £110,000 to support organisations that worked with vulnerable people. One example is the Young Lives Foundation which supported the most vulnerable young people in the County.

(h) **Kent School Games**

KCC were unable to hold its flagship Kent School Games this year. However, two schemes; My Active Rainbow and My Active Life had been developed as an alternative option to the Games. This provided young people with the opportunity to work through a series of challenges and gain rewards including Kent School Games Bronze, Silver and Gold Medals.

(i) **Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and Explore Kent**

During the lockdown there had been a significant increase in people wishing to get out into the countryside to visit KCC's Country Parks and use the extensive PROW network. The Explore Kent website had experienced a significant spike for people looking for information and record engagements on their social media platform. Mr Hill actively encouraged everyone to make use of the excellent service.

Explore Kent was also working with the PRoW service to access government funding to promote safe travel and route improvements. All KCC's Country Parks were busy, often with full car parks and were running a popular take away offer from the cafes.

(j) **Kent's Creative Economy**

The creative sector had been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and Kent experienced the sudden and complete shutdown of all spaces for public performance with rehearsal spaces, studios and workshops closed. Kent's creative economy continued to rely heavily on tourism, particularly the night-time economy and festivals sector, all of which were temporarily redundant. In response to the crisis, the KCC Culture and Economy team lead a series of roundtable discussions with over 100 sector professionals. Information gathered from the sessions helped to inform KCC's plan for renewal and resilience and was also used to inform the Arts Council

England and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in order to access emergency funding. KCC also refocused the arts investment fund to provide immediate support to struggling businesses and continued to work with the Arts Council as part of their national initiative to distribute 4,000 'Let's Create' packs containing art and craft materials to primary and secondary age children across the county. The service is currently working with the Kent Cultural Transformation Board to look at opportunities and innovations to support economic and social renewal of the creative sector in Kent.

2. Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Whiting thanked the staff and officers at KCC for their continued hard work and their ability to provide an excellent service during the pandemic.

(b) **The National Institute of Agricultural Botany**

The National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) had received £18million from the government's Strength in Places Fund which formed part of the £33million investment programme for innovative projects and emerging technologies that would help to drive economic growth in the UK.

(c) **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme**

KCC continued to make the case to government for an increased number of workers to be included within the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) and continued to support the Pick for Britain campaign launched by the National Farmers Union (NFU).

(d) **Kent Film Unit**

Mr Whiting informed Members that 20 projects had been cancelled as a result of Covid with a consequential loss of £2.5million, however, officers had undertaken a significant amount of work to ensure that KCC was in the best possible position to progress with projects as restrictions around Covid were lifted.

3. The Cabinet Members responded to comments and questions as follows:

(a) Mr Hill responded to a request to reopen libraries in the eastern part of Swale and within the Faversham, Canterbury area and confirmed that in line with Government guidelines, KCC would only be reopening one library within each district in the first tranche. A review of the geographical spread of libraries would take place as further libraries were reopened.

- (b) Mr Hill confirmed that the public toilets within KCC's country parks had reopened when the public car parks had reopened.
 - (c) In response to the backlog of birth registrations, Mr Hill confirmed that 12 locations had reopened and anticipated that the backlog would reduce within a 4 to 6-week period.
4. It was RESOLVED that the update be noted, with thanks.

227. Decision Summary Report
(Item 8)

- 1. The Chairman introduced the report which provided a summary of the decisions taken or in progress by the Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services and Cabinet Member for Economic Development during the temporary suspension of Cabinet Committee meetings during the COVID crisis.
- 2. It was RESOLVED that the report be noted.

228. Performance Dashboard - Q4 2019/20
(Item 9)

Rachel Kennard (Chief Analyst, Strategic Commissioning – Performance & Analytics) was in attendance for this item.

- 1. Ms Kennard introduced the report which showed the progress made against targets set for Key Performance indicators (KPIs) up to the end of March 2020. Several services were impacted by Coronavirus at the end of the quarter, which affected both performance and data availability of some indicators. Ms Kennard drew members attention to the typographical error on page 21 of the agenda pack and clarified that two of the KPIs were below target but did achieve floor standard (amber) and four did not achieve the floor standard (red). In conclusion, Mrs Kennard confirmed that fifteen of the nineteen had performed above the floor target and thirteen had performed at the level required.
- 2. It was RESOLVED that the performance report be noted.

229. 20/00063 - Reinvestment of Growing Places Fund
(Item 10)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development) was in attendance for this item.

- 1. Mr Smith introduced the report that summarised the process adopted by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), to award capital

from the Growing Places Fund to new projects which would help unlock economic growth in local areas; and provided details of the Kent and Medway bids that SELEP had prioritised for investment.

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

(a) Mr Smith confirmed that Kent County Council (KCC) would be responsible for the repayment of the loan to the SELEP, plus any interest charge incurred as a penalty for late repayment. However, Mr Smith verified that KCC had no previous experience in dealing with such a matter to date and this was primarily due to the extensive management of each project.

(b) Mr Smith verified that the proposal for the Swanley Town Centre project did not need to be resubmitted. The method adopted by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership was to prioritise those projects which were affordable and already at the delivery stage of the process. As the Growing Places Fund received repayments from loans upon completion of projects, this could potentially be reinvested into new or awaited projects in the pipeline.

(c) In response to concerns regarding the potential need to reassess the list of prioritised projects in light of Covid, Mr Smith assured the Committee that whilst the list was subject to change there was no justification to date to support this. However, the government had invited Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to put forward the projects which were urgently required in light of the pandemic and an extensive list of projects was submitted by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership to SELEP. As a result, the government had announced that additional funding would be made available to each LEP across the country (including SELEP) which would fund those projects considered to be urgent as a result of the Covid pandemic.

(d) In response to queries relating to the No Use Empty (NUE) Scheme around the percentage of houses which had been prioritised for Social Housing as opposed to Affordable Housing, Mr Smith, in agreement with Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) agreed to bring a report back to the Committee to cover Members questions.

3. It was RESOLVED that the proposed decision (20/00063) to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, to:

(a) Note the projects in Kent that the South East Local Enterprise Partnership has prioritised to receive Growing Places Funding (GPF),

- (b) Act as the accountable body for projects within Kent County Council's geographical boundaries that receive GPF funding approval from the SELEP Accountability Board; and
- (c) Delegate to the Section 151 Officer the authority to sign on KCC's behalf a loan agreement or equivalent, where this is required to draw down funds following business case approval,

be endorsed.

230. Manston Business Park Thanet - East Kent Opportunities LLP

(Item 11)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Matt Hyland (Executive Project Coordinator – East Kent Opportunities LLP Project Coordinator) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith and Mr Hyland introduced the report that set out the key successes and objectives of the East Kent Opportunities Limited Liability Partnership (EKO LLP), in particular the work that continued to be undertaken by EKO LLP to facilitate and deliver the maximum employment creation opportunities through the landholdings at Manston Business Park.
2. Mr Hyland responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) Mr Hyland confirmed that since the start of the joint venture in 2008, there had been fourteen Property Solicitors. There was a predominant issue around the continuity and retention of Solicitors, however, Mr Hyland noted that the positive aspect of this was the EKO LLPs ability to succession plan and continually refresh enthusiasm into the project.
 - (b) Mr Hyland addressed concerns relating to the potential difficulties that could arise from a family owned business and recognised that with most family run businesses a generational change could have a number of implications. However, having undergone a recent restructure the Mayweathers' had announced their intention to purchase the two remaining option parcels in an attempt to finish the Maple Business Park.
 - (c) Members questioned whether the acquisition of office space was still viable as many businesses had started to operate from home a result of Covid. Mr Hyland confirmed that a majority of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that had expressed an interest to operate from Manston were those who worked within the construction industry and required large storage or workshop facilities. A majority of SME Directors who owned companies often purchased commercial property

through the investment of personal funds. The tax advantage of this, was that they could then rent that property out to another company.

3. It was RESOLVED that the report which featured the current economic and regeneration objectives achieved by EKO LLP, be noted.

231. Economic Recovery Plan

(Item 12)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Ross Gill (Associate Director of SQW) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report which set out the draft Economic Recovery Plan and the work which was underway to develop specific actions, both for local delivery and for the engagement with Government as the Kent and Medway economy continued to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis. These included the development of potential initiatives (capital and revenue) that could support the delivery of the Economic Recovery Plan and which would help to place Kent in a strong position to respond to funding opportunities and requests from Government. A presentation by Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Mr Gill (Associate Director of SQW) and Mr Smith accompanied the report and set out the actions to support business and jobs, the economic impact of Covid-19 and analysis of data; and the next steps in taking forward the medium-term plan for renewal and resilience. Mr Smith informed Members that a Strategy was in the process of being developed, however, the focus of work was around identifying a list of priorities and key actions to help support the businesses and people of Kent who had been impacted by Covid-19.
2. The officer and Cabinet Member for Economic Development responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) In response to comments raised around the ability to adapt to change and the flexibility of the Economic Recovery Plan to respond to the frequent changes that were being brought forward by Government, Mr Smith informed the Committee that the Plan had a lifespan of twelve to eighteen months. Therefore, whilst the current set of actions responded to the current needs of the county, there was scope to refresh the document over its lifespan to identify new measures. Mr Smith informed Members that three new loan schemes were due to be launched, and again, throughout the duration of those schemes, Kent County Council would be able to draw upon the lessons learned around what companies required loans, what support would be required from KCC to support those companies; and then use that information to adapt the Economic Recovery Plan.

- (b) Mrs Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport) and Mr Smith responded to comments concerning Brexit and confirmed that KCC had moved into the planning phase of the UK's transition away from the EU. Mr Smith noted that whilst the Economic Recovery Plan was not part of the Brexit planning, through extensive joined up working with businesses and public authorities across England, both plans were complimentary in how they addressed the need for KCC to invest its resources into the people and businesses of Kent to ensure economic growth.
- (c) Mr Whiting assured Members that engagement with district councils and partner agencies had been crucial in the development of the Economic Recovery Plan and this was apparent at the Leaders webinar which welcomed over 400 participants, all of whom had supported and continued to play a significant part in the development and implementation of the Kent and Medway Economic Recovery Plan. Mrs Cooper supplemented this by reassuring Members that work was also being done in conjunction with colleagues in Children's, Young People and Education, those within the freight industry and those within customs which included the potential development of a customs training programme due to increased staff demand.
- (d) Mrs Cooper informed Members that the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) did not have a separate Economic Recovery Plan. The KRF was a multi-agency gathering established to bring together planning and response to emergencies. The Economic Recovery Plan for Kent and Medway as set out within the report was led by KCC.
- (e) Mr Smith confirmed that the details of the Infrastructure plan were yet to be finalised, upon which, they would be submitted to Government. Mr Whiting was persistent in his message to Ministers in explaining the needs of the Kent and Medway economy and pursued Government support.
- (f) In response to concerns relating to young people in Kent and prospective job opportunities, Mr Smith endorsed the need for apprenticeship programmes and assured Members that KCC was incorporating the economic and social needs of young people within the Economic Recovery Plan. Mr Smith reminded Members that there were various strands of work going into the Plan, all of which would help to ensure a robust, and futureproof, economic framework for both Kent and Medway.
- (g) Mr Smith assured the Committee that communication, confidence and trust with officers, Members and partner agencies was key, and this formed one of the five channels of activity within the Economic

Recovery Plan. Mr Smith acknowledged that there would be periods of trial and error in terms of the media platforms used and how information was disseminated throughout the county but affirmed to Members that KCC listened and engaged with all groups.

3. Mr Whiting thanked the Committee for their comments and provided assurance that all Members would continue to be listened to and receive regular updates as plans progressed.
4. It was RESOLVED that, the actions to be prioritised in supporting economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, be endorsed.

232. Tourism sector reopening

(Item 13)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Dafydd Pugh (Project Manager) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith and Mr Pugh introduced the report which provided an overview of the progress towards the reopening of the tourism sector and the work underway to support those preparations in Kent. They highlighted the extensive efforts of Visit Kent and drew attention to discussions that have taken place under the Straits Committee with neighbouring regions on the content to explore future joint initiatives as borders reopen to visitors.
2. Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) expressed his thanks to Deirdre Wells, OBE (Chief Executive Officer, Visit Kent) and to Mr Pugh for their extensive work and for supporting the meetings of the Straits Committee which has underpinned the success and support that KCC and its counterparts had received from Government and the British Embassy.
3. The officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) In response to whether Kent had benefited from higher staycation enquiries compared to other parts of the country, the officers confirmed that it was too early to answer as the data would not be available, however, this information would be available to report at a future Committee.
 - (b) Mr Smith confirmed that the communication and marketing programme that had been launched by Visit Kent was modelled on the Countryside Code (*statutory guidance issued by Government from natural England and the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs*).
4. It was RESOLVED that the report be noted.

233. The Kent and Medway Growth Hub Covid-19 Business Support Helpline
(Item 14)

David Smith (Director of Economic Development) and Martyn Riley (Programme Manager, Business Investment) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Smith introduced the report which provided an overview of the enhanced growth hub service which had been designed, implemented and delivered specifically as a response to the Covid-19 crisis. Mr Smith commended the Chamber of Commerce for the exemplary speed in which it had managed to establish such a successful helpline and said that it was an excellent example of a contributory brokerage model between Kent County Council and the local authorities within Kent and Medway which had been recognised through the positive response from businesses. Mr Riley highlighted the key points within the report, particularly in relation to the achievements of the helpline with approval ratings at 96%; and also, the next steps which included the use of intelligence to identify what businesses required for them to return to growth.
2. The officers responded to comments and questions as follows:
 - (a) In response to comments concerning the number of enquiries received from businesses in Swale, Mr Smith clarified that Swale Borough Council had established its own helpline service to support local business which had proven to be incredibly successful and therefore fewer calls were being filtered through the hub that was managed by the Chamber of Commerce.
3. Mr Whiting (Cabinet Member for Economic Development) expressed his thanks to Mr Smith and Mr Riley for the accelerated speed in which they managed to establish the helpline and commended the overall success of the scheme, including the work that had been carried out with partners across Kent.
4. It was RESOLVED that the contents of the report and the observed support provided to Kent Business in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, be noted.

234. Work Programme 2020-21
(Item 15)

1. Mr Smith informed Members that district visits would be rescheduled in the future in accordance with government guidelines.

2. It was RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted, subject to the inclusion of the following items:

(a) A report on the No Use Empty Scheme containing information around affordable and social housing

(b) An update report on the tourism sector