

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 24 June 2021.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr D L Brazier, Mrs S Chandler, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mrs S Prendergast and Miss S J Carey

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Sweetland.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021

(Item 3)

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 25 January 2021 were a correct record and that they be signed by the chairman.

3. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 4)

1) Mrs Bell said that home testing kits for Covid-19, which were available online and from pharmacies had been popular and therefore, KCC test centres were being scaled down.

There had been 24 test centres across the county and 600,000 tests had been conducted at the test centres during the pandemic. Most centres were to close over the following weeks. Centres were to remain open with increased hours from 1 July 2021 at Sessions House in Maidstone and at Eurogate Business Park in Ashford.

Weekly home testing was encouraged as people were going to be socialising more and to register the test results so there was a record of how many people were undertaking the tests.

The figures up to 13 June for Kent and Medway showed that around 2 million vaccines had been administered. 74% of all eligible adults had their first dose, 58% of 30 to 39 year olds had the first dose and 96% of the 4 most vulnerable groups had their second dose. The vaccinations were rolling out to everyone aged 18 and over via the national booking service.

The government had confirmed that people working in all care homes registered with the CQC would need to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19. Over 90% of staff in KCC homes had both doses and in other adult care homes, 84% of employees had their first dose and 72% had their second dose of the Covid-19 vaccination.

KCC was well placed to support care homes with ensuring the staff were vaccinated, given the strong working relationship with the care sector, Public Health representatives and the vaccination team.

Domestic abuse affected over 2 million people a year in England and Wales. This equated to between 75,000 and 80,000 adults in Kent and Medway and accounted for 15% of all crime across the region. Since 2017, KCC had worked with partners to commission the Kent Integrated Abuse Contract which provided support for those experiencing abuse. A recent study found that abuse increased during international football tournaments. There was a 47% increase in the number of reported alcohol related domestic abuse cases on days when England were playing and an 18% increase on the days after. There was a campaign called "Show domestic abuse the red card" led by KCC and involving all partners encouraging all residents, businesses and community groups to be extra vigilant for signs of domestic abuse during Euro 2020 and to help direct victims towards support services.

2) Mrs Chandler said that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) began its inspection of the Youth Offending Service on the week starting 21 June. A briefing on the outcome of the inspection was to be discussed at the September CYPE Cabinet Committee.

The difficult decision had been made for KCC to stop accepting UASCs from the Port of Dover. Despite KCC's ongoing efforts to work with the Home Office regarding the voluntary National Transfer Scheme (NTS), KCC had again reached an unsafe capacity and ceased to accept any further new UASC arrivals from Monday 14 June, just 10 months after having reluctantly taken similar action in August 2020. To continue would have meant the care of the children and young people already in KCC's care would have been at risk.

At that time, there were 422 UASCs in KCC's care. Social workers and Independent Review Officers had caseloads considerably above the DfE recommended guidelines. KCC was also providing support to 1100 care leavers.

Of 242 UASC arrivals between 1 January and 1 June 2021, only 52 had been transferred to other local authorities under the voluntary National Transfer Scheme. This was despite considerable constructive work that had been undertaken with the Home Office and DfE since August 2020. However, it was felt that the National Transfer Scheme needs to be mandatory in order to be effective. The outcome of the consultation held in 2020 on the National Transfer Scheme and the revised voluntary scheme were announced following KCC's decision. KCC had written to the Home Secretary regarding the first steps towards Judicial Review and had received a response which was being considered.

Virtual School Kent were accepting nominations for this year's awards, for Kent Children and Young People in Care. The deadline for Early Years' nominations and those in Year R to Year 11 was Friday, 30 July and for those in Year 12, Year 13 and our Care Leavers, the deadline was Friday, 27 August. It was hoped that the celebration of the achievements of our children and young people would take place in person and nominations were requested.

The independent review of children's social care had reached its first major milestone and had published its 'Case for Change' which set out what the review had heard so far and where they thought the system needed to change. The review was inviting comment on its initial findings and a response would be produced by KCC as an authority and individual social workers and practitioners had been encouraged to directly respond themselves. More information was available online: [independent review of children's social care website](#).

For Members' awareness, it had been agreed that an all-member briefing on mental health was to be held by Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health and Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services with officers to help better explain KCC's role in terms of the services offered and commissioned and to help address any concerns that members had.

3) Mrs Prendergast said guidance had been issued by the DfE and circulated to schools in May regarding this year's process for the Kent Test and exams. The guidance advised that authorities carry out selection testing in September as normal to enable parents to have their child's results before the statutory national closing date of 31 October for secondary school applications. This meant that authorities would no longer have DfE support if they elected to delay their assessment as was required last year.

The Covid precautions set out in earlier advice remained in place, pending the announcement of further operational guidance for all schools for the autumn term. As parents were to be provided with their child's Kent Test result before the application deadline, it would also not be necessary to increase the number of preference options that they were provided, meaning a return to the normal standard of four.

Families with children interested in attending a grammar school were to register them for testing by the closing date of 1 July and details were available on the kent.gov webpage.

In 2021, more than ever, there was a strong focus on the interests of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose learning was likely to have suffered most during lockdown periods. Officers had worked closely with schools on the Head Teacher Assessment referral process and were to continue to update them regularly on this and any specifics around the Kent Test. Schools had been asked to support those parents applying for the Kent Test and to ensure that they were aware of the free familiarisation materials accessible through the Kent Test pages of the KCC website. Once registration for testing was closed, KCC was to write to those parents who had registered their child to confirm the arrangement for the 2021 Test.

Mrs Prendergast had written to the Secretary of State for Education on 14 June to express KCC's concern regarding educational support for disadvantaged pupils, particularly those eligible for Free School Meals.

The DfE had announced its intentions to make changes to the calculation of the pupil premium for the financial year 2021- 22 which would potentially result in a loss of over £4 million to Kent schools during the year - a considerable amount bearing in mind the number of families meeting the threshold had been increasing as a result of Covid-19. Furthermore, the government's announcement of a planned investment of just £1.4 billion over three years, or £50 per pupil per annum for post Covid

educational catch up was an additional area of concern, particularly since the National Audit Office had found that less than half of pupils who were benefiting from the existing tuition support fund were eligible for free school meals.

Various studies showed that schools with high levels of disadvantaged children had experienced higher levels of learning loss than other schools, particularly in secondary schools and the funding that had been announced would not address the learning gap. As a council, Kent was investing over £10m funding in the post Covid Reconnect Programme for children and young people but were not able to compensate for the lack of national investment.

Ministers had given some indication that additional funding may be forthcoming and a significant uplift in current funding would be welcomed by schools and the Council in supporting them in addressing the post-Covid learning gap for the most deprived children and young people. A copy of Mrs Prendergast's letter had been shared with schools and with Kent MPs.

Officers at KCC and those working in schools were thanked for all their hard work as the unprecedented challenges continued as a result of the pandemic.

4) Mr Brazier said that he had high level discussions with officers about the renewal of the Highways Maintenance Contract which had been extended. The next phase was to be market engagement. He was involved with Vision Zero, KCC's ground-breaking highway safety strategy with its high level of community involvement which would be presented at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 29 June.

Work was being undertaken with bus operators on "Bus Back Better" – the government's national bus strategy. Work was being undertaken with Kent Communications to develop some public engagement to gain feedback about what is important to bus users and a stakeholder group was being formed, including representatives from Kent districts and boroughs. A Member seminar had been requested by Mr Brazier.

A briefing had been given to Mr Brazier on the design and operation of the new Dover fast-track services from the New Heights housing area at Whitfield.

Mr Brazier had visited Stagecoach at Herne Bay and discussed the company's ethos and plans for the future. He also attended a trial of hydrogen-powered buses in Sevenoaks and witnessed the operators drinking the water that was the vehicles' only waste product.

A review was being undertaken of LTP4, "Growth without Gridlock" 2016-31, with a view to early work on LTP5. This was to take into consideration the many changes there had been since the plan's inception. The move towards a new plan was to strengthen KCC's position in the light of the changes brought about by the Brexit transition, the Lower Thames Crossing, innovation in transport technology, the Rail Strategy, the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the Environment Strategy and the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy as well as the Renewal and Resilience Plan. It was to be an enormously complex exercise and it was expected that there would be a second round of funding for Active Travel for which Mr Brazier had received bids in anticipation.

Mr Brazier had received a briefing regarding the start of construction for the Lower Thames Crossing. KCC had achieved much in the way of mitigations on the local environment, communities and the local network. Highways England anticipated difficulties with its Development Consent Order and had withdrawn it while further work was undertaken. It was expected that they would re-submit their plans to the Planning Inspectorate in 2021 and if they were successful, construction would begin in 2023, for completion in 2029.

An informal group was being formed to work on removing HGVs from rural lanes, villages and residential areas and for drivers to use the facilities that exist for 'paid for' overnight parking. There had been some unfavourable feedback from the logistics industry and it was intended to look carefully at government policy and how the UK could emulate Europe in providing more and better facilities for haulage and compel drivers to use facilities.

Contact had been made regarding gridlock in Dartford resulting from congestion at the Dartford Crossing and it was hoped that a working group could be created with the town's MP to see what could be done. It was hoped that Lower Thames Crossing funding would allow some helpful interventions.

It was reported that the government had no plans to provide east facing slips on the M25 at Sevenoaks.

5) Miss Carey thanked Mr Hills for acting as Cabinet Member for Environment for the previous 5 weeks. External recognition had been given with LoCASE receiving a national award. LoCASE was the 'low carbon across the south east' team which supported businesses in Kent and more widely across the south east invest to become more sustainable through reduced energy costs and lower carbon emissions, as well as expand in the environmental sector. The Low Carbon Kent team was unanimously voted the winners of the "Delivering Clean Growth" category at the awards of the Association of Directors of Environment Economy Planning and Transport. The judges said that KCC stood out from the rest by the scale and extent of its achievements in linking targeted activities across the south east region to stimulate demand, support supply and nurture innovation for sustainable and clean growth.

£21million in Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding had been awarded to KCC in March towards Net Zero work. At the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 29 June, Members were to receive an update on how the funding was to be used and the project management around it. KCC had committed to challenging timescales but it was a major step forward in the route to Net Zero for KCC's services and estates.

The Waste Team had been working on the creation of a circular waste economy so that waste produced in Kent would be processed or recycled within the county. Thanks to a contract with Thanet Waste Services, all the street sweepings from across Kent were treated in Kent. Kent's residents wanted their waste to be properly recycled and could be assured that even the dust from the streets was staying in Kent to be recycled and reused.

6) Mr Murphy said thanks to officers who had introduced him to numerous organisations and for their guidance. Mr Murphy had written to the relevant Secretaries of State to call for a meeting to discuss the growth of housing in Kent and the potential effects on the environment and had made reference to the Stodmarsh watercourse catchment area and the 'Neutral Nutrients' issue.

Broadband was essential to the future growth of Kent and a report had been sent to the government in response to their call for evidence regarding their broadband roll out programme across the UK. This was under review and updates were delayed and expected in mid to late July 2021. This was due to BT Openreach planning to expand their commercial building programme which in turn had led to an extension from the government. Due to the rural nature of Kent, there had been ongoing issues with the roll out to some areas in providing adequate broadband to homes and business premises. The pandemic had highlighted the importance of reliable, fast broadband as vital links for promoting Kent's economy. The Broadband team would be pushing for every possible assistance including a new higher value voucher scheme to ensure that Kent was not overlooked when the government's new roll out plan was announced. The Broadband Team was responding to specific enquiries from MPs and residents regarding the provision of services in the county.

EDF had informed of their intention to decommission Dungeness B Power Station within the next 10 years and work was being undertaken to set up working groups of interested parties, including KCC to work with EDF assisting in the transition of the station.

Mr Murphy had visited Discovery Park in Sandwich and met with the owners and their business team. The KCC Economic Development team was to work with the owners and other partners to assist in promoting the facilities with the objective of attracting companies, particularly in the life sciences sector. The owners have a progressive plan to engage with the educational community at all levels to promote interest in qualifications in the sciences and therefore, generating the necessary skills and knowledge base in the local population required by the companies they were hoping to attract.

Work was being undertaken by KCC and Dover District Council to implement changes required for the siting of the Inland Border Facility at Whitfield in Dover to accommodate HMRC, Border Control and Dover Port Health Authority. In preparation for 1 January 2022, the facility will require alterations to the road network in and around Whitfield Industrial Park and access to the Park from the Port of Dover. This work was to be of importance to maintain the free flow of vehicles from the Port, through the facilities and onward to their final destinations but also to ensure that nearby businesses and local communities were not inconvenienced.

7) Mr Hill said that community services had made a vital contribution to KCC's response during the pandemic and thanked all officers for their efforts. Most services had returned to normal. The Country Parks and Public Rights of Way had seen a huge increase in usage and were dealing with the wear and tear which had been exacerbated by a wet winter. Trading Standards and Coroners were returning to near normal levels of activity, although both services had a large backlog of complex and extensive court cases. Wardens had continued to be very busy and there had been an increase in requests for wardens for community engagement along the seafronts, in parks and in youth 'hotspots' due to the number of complaints received about anti-social behaviour, litter and consumption of alcohol in public spaces.

Libraries and Registrations had continued to be significantly impacted by Covid-19 restrictions. 42 libraries were open for socially distanced book borrowing, book browsing and IT access. The mobile library service was visiting communities offering the 'select and collect' book offer from a new fleet of vehicles. It had been hoped that all libraries could be opened by the end of July 2021. Following the extension of restrictions to 19 July, it was expected that the remainder of libraries would be open by the middle of August 2021. It was planned that the libraries would still open even if restrictions were extended beyond 19 July 2021.

There had been an unprecedented demand for wedding ceremonies for the summer of 2021 and there was a commitment to conduct over 60% more ceremonies than in a normal year. Despite best efforts, the service had to cease taking further bookings for July, August and September 2021 but would continue to facilitate ceremonies for emergency situations.

It had been confirmed that up to 32,000 fans were able to attend each Championship day of 149th Open Golf at Royal St George's at Sandwich and a total attendance of 130,000 spectators was expected, in comparison with around 200,000 spectators in normal times.

8) In a pre-recorded video, Mr Sweetland said that a new online engagement platform had gone live on the KCC website which created a flexible environment for engagement and consultation with residents. Residents' views and opinions would be sought in a variety of ways such as conversations and using interactive maps. It was hoped that this would improve engagement from the public.

Teams within Mr Sweetland's portfolio were working toward 'recovery' from the pandemic and it had been encouraging to see the numbers of those who were getting Covid-19 testing every week. KCC had carried out over half a million symptom-free Covid-19 tests through testing sites. Home testing kits were the most popular method of testing but everyone was reminded to get tested twice a week even after full vaccination.

Support had been given to Public Health England with enhanced testing in the areas it had been needed, namely in Canterbury and Maidstone. Alongside testing, the work of Kent Local 'Contact and Trace' partnership had continued to ensure that people were given the right advice and support if they needed to isolate.

KCC was helping young people to get a good start in their working lives and was making an investment in the Kickstart Programme. 50 places had been planned across the organisation and it was linked to the Reconnect Programme. A further 70 places were being supported through schools. The KCC Graduate Scheme had been revised and had been recognised by the Job Crowd, a UK graduate and apprentice employer ranking system based on employer feedback. For the second year running, KCC had been ranked as 'Number 1' and KCC were the only local authority to make the list.

The Kent Summer Fair was to take place on 10 and 11 July at the Detling Showground. KCC was to be present at the fair and the theme would be 'Walk to Wellbeing'.

9) The Leader said that KCC's focus was on the economic, social and environmental recovery of the county and the work outlined in the Cabinet Members' updates supported recovery. A meeting of County Council was to take place on 20 July 2021 and one of the important items was to relate to KCC's relationship with the NHS, joint working and the supporting structures around joint working.

At the end of March, KCC had 270 UASCs in its care and the situation had quickly changed since that time and this underlined how serious the situation relating to UASCs was.

4. Quarterly Performance Report, Quarter 4, 2020/21

(Item 5)

Rachel Kennard, Chief Analyst was in attendance for this item.

- 1) Rachel Kennard outlined the report for Quarter 4 with results of 35 key performance indicators (KPIs) from January up to the end of March 2021. KPIs were rated red, amber or green based on the most recent performance against targets. Overall, the position was positive despite the ongoing challenges presented in the first 3 months of 2021. In this Quarter, 2 more KPIs were rated green than in Quarter 3. 22 of the KPIs were 'RAG' rated as green, 10 rated as amber and 3 performing below target rated as red.
- 2) The 3 areas that had been 'RAG' rated as red were:
 - The KPI under Economic Development and Communities, 'Developer Contributions secured as a percentage of the amount sought' had been affected by one large project.
 - There had been an improvement for the KPI under Children, Young People and Education, 'ECHPs issued within 20 weeks' as an outside contractor was working on the backlog.
 - Under Public Health, the number of eligible people receiving an NHS Health Check had been affected by the pandemic as the programme was halted due to national guidance and whilst it had been resumed in Quarter 2, a new target was proposed for 2021-22 which would take into account the reduced delivery from GPs.
- 3) The KPI relating to complaints handled within agreed timescales had improved and was 'RAG-rated' amber for Quarter 4.
- 4) Further positive points from the report were noted:
 - The Kent.gov website had continued to be very popular in terms of visitor numbers and more transactions were taking place online.
 - Greenhouse gas emissions for the KCC estate had continued on a downward trend and were ahead of target.
 - The proportion of KCC clients in residential nursing care where the CQC rating was 'good' or 'outstanding' had increased and this was ahead of target.

- In Public Health, the number of mandated universal checks delivered by the health visiting service had continued to increase.
- 5) It was proposed to make changes to the KPIs for the next financial year, 2021-22:
- In Environment and Transportation, the greenhouse gas emissions target was to be replaced with a target designed to measure progress towards Net Zero by 2030, covering KCC and traded companies as well as the KCC estate.
 - In Education and Early Help, the target relating to ECHP timescales was to be increased to 60%.
 - In Integrated Children's Services, the KPIs were to be streamlined so targets relating to the percentage of 'front door' contacts where the final decision was made within 3 working days and percentage of children in care with 3 or more placements in the last 12 months were to be removed.
 - In Public Health, new targets were proposed for NHS Health Checks which were to take into account reduced delivery from GP surgeries.
- 6) Miss Carey said the target relating to emissions was being re-based taking into account more factors and to be consistent with the way targets were measured nationally. The long term target of Net Zero was clear and it was important for Kent that it was met.
- 7) Ms Kennard advised that the previous emissions target would be linked to the new target meaning that progress could be tracked and would show the journey that KCC had taken.
- 8) Resolved that the Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 4 be noted.

5. Revenue and Capital Outturn 2020/21

(Item 6)

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director (Finance) was in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford said that the report outlined the provisional outturn for 2020-21, combined for 'business as usual' (£775,000), and Covid-19 (£26.773million) and after taking into account the 'roll forward' requests was an underspend of £27.5million. The large underspend was predominantly due to the government Covid-19 related grants which had been received late in the financial year and were one-off payments. It was requested that these underspend amounts be set aside as normal earmarked reserves to support future Covid-related costs, loss of income and any unrealised savings.

All directorates had reported 'business as usual' underspends. The main underspend was in Adult Social Care which was a result of people choosing not to place loved ones in long term funded care and giving continued support at home and the temporary legislative changes in relation to how hospital discharge was funded.

Children, Young People and Education had seen an underspend in Integrated Children's Services in the care leavers' and adoption services. This was offset by delays in delivery of the Changes for Kent's children programme.

The reported Covid-19 position took into consideration all additional spending, unrealised savings, loss of income and underspends and amounted to £42.4million. Of this, £28.8 million of the roll forward requests related to Covid-19 time critical spend with the main areas being: £16million for Helping Hands, £7.5million for the Re-Connect programme and £5million for market sustainability.

The Schools' delegated budgets had reported an overspend of £8.9million which reflected the combination of high demand and the high cost per child of high needs placement.

The provisional capital outturn position was an underspend of £184.8million which was made up of £9.4million of real variances and £175.4million of re-phasing. The high figure of re-phasing was not to be repeated in future years as the 10 year capital programme was intended to enable capital plans to be phased more realistically over the lifetime of the projects.

2) Ms Cooke said it had been a very challenging year from a financial perspective, both in terms of monitoring and reporting for the budget due to grants coming in at short or with no notice and the finance team had tried to separate 'business as usual' activity from Covid-19 activity. Ms Cooke thanked her team and the budget holders across KCC for their efforts over the last financial year.

There were opportunities moving forward in managing the risks and to make KCC as financially resilient as possible, while still delivering a budget for 'business as usual' activities and strategic priorities.

3) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations set out in the report.

6. Medium Term Financial Outlook

(Item 7)

Zena Cooke, Corporate Director, Finance and Dave Shipton, Head of Finance (Policy, Planning & Strategy) were in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Oakford introduced the report. KCC had only been given a one year settlement and work had been done on the assumption that KCC would not receive further one-off government grants. The one-off grants received were for Covid-19 related activity and the impact of Covid-19 had continued to be felt. The Covid-19 underspend was to be brought forward to protect and cover ongoing costs relating to Covid-19. There was uncertainty as to what the impact of the Delta variant would be.

The grants allowed KCC to delay the consideration of some areas of saving and those would need to be reconsidered as part of the budget setting process. There were also concerns around the increase in inflation which had a significant impact on the budget.

2) Mr Shipton said that due to uncertainty around the pace of recovery, different plans were required for each scenario. One assumed the eradication of the impact of Covid-19 and a rapid economic recovery. Work undertaken had shown the council tax base had declined at the fastest rate compared to any other county council. The speed with which the council tax base was recovered was crucial for KCC's budget.

Continued restrictions relating to Covid-19 would negatively affect KCC's spending, reductions in the council tax base and slower recovery.

The impact of inflation in the past had been less due to much of the council's activities being funded through government grants which went up in line with inflation; this had now changed. The two priorities for updates moving forward would be looking at the speed of recovery and the impact of inflation.

3) The Leader said that it would be important to look at the changes in demand for Children's and Adult Social Care as this had been impacted by the pandemic. There had been an increase in the complexity of cases but there also could be a 'spring back' in terms of demand.

4) Ms Cooke said commitments had been made to using evidence-based information and analysis as part of the budget setting, so not just looking at the financial element of the budget. Outcome based budgeting was looking at where money was spent, whether it was effective and whether it delivered the desired outcomes and the impact it was having.

Some outcome measures were available nationally- for example, outcome metrics were available for social care and public health.

In terms of the outlook, there was still only a one year settlement but a 3 year settlement was anticipated. Officers were pushing for early notification but it was proposed that this also be pursued by Members.

4) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7. Key Decision 21/00042 - Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme

(Item 8)

Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director, CYPE and David Adams, Reconnect Programme Director were in attendance for this item.

1) Mrs Chandler introduced the report and thanked the team working on Reconnect. At the meeting of Cabinet held in March, there had been concern about the impact that the pandemic had on the lives of children and young people. Evidence had increased of the impact but the way in which children and young people had been affected varied widely. All children and young people in Kent had been affected in some way and that was why the Reconnect Programme was universal. Young people wanted the Programme to be about moving forward and positivity.

The key aims were reconnecting children and young people to:

- health and happiness
- Friends, family and community
- Sport, activity and the outdoors
- Economic wellbeing
- Learning missed

The Reconnect Programme was a cohesive and coordinated offer which offered flexibility and local delivery.

Kent-wide projects were to be offered through leisure centres which were to contribute to the aims around sport and activity. Work had been done with travel operator businesses to offer passes for free travel in the school summer holidays.

Local business, individuals, organisations and providers were able to contribute to the programme. Detailed information was on the website regarding how they could get involved.

2) Mrs Prendergast said teachers and school staff had worked hard to support and educate children under difficult circumstances. Schools and Early Years settings were working hard to address learning loss and it was hoped Reconnect would offer the additional support needed.

3) Mr Dunkley said that he welcomed the decision. He said that he felt the Reconnect Programme was ambitious and unique. It was a universal programme which tuned into the ambition and optimism of children and young people but was also targeted for children who had been particularly disadvantaged by the pandemic.

4) Mr Adams said that pace and agility would be key in delivering the Reconnect Programme and to respond to emerging and changing needs. It was to be a partnership effort and therefore, the support and commitment of colleagues across KCC, across partner agencies and in the community was needed to make the programme work. Thanks were given to all that had contributed thus far. Infrastructure had been put in place to deal with questions, queries and offers of support.

There was an agreement in principle with leisure centres across the county and the finalised arrangements were to be publicised. Arrangements were being put in place regarding the bus offer for children and potentially families during the summer. Work was being done to resource other services providing support such as counselling and mentoring services.

KCC had received more than 50 offers from organisations regarding promotion of the programme and over 500 people and organisations had subscribed to be kept informed about Reconnect.

Local Children's Partnership Groups were key to the programme and £600,000 had been identified to support those groups on an interim basis, pending Cabinet's decision around funding for the Programme. There were to be grant opportunities for organisations working with children and young people.

5) In response to questions, it was noted:

- Through the Holiday Activity and Food Programme, there were some providers who were to deliver outdoor activities over the summer. The Education People were to deliver outdoor activities from Bewl Water. It was recognised that there were challenges for children to access some sites and options were being considered.

- KCC was committed to securing best value and that additional resources be levered in where possible, for example, Arts Council funding. There was a dynamic funding model being used.

6) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations as set out in the report.

8. Revising the draft Civil Society Strategy and Support to the Voluntary Sector 21-22 and beyond

(Item 9)

Lydia Jackson, Policy and Relationships Adviser and David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance, were in attendance for this item.

1) The Leader said that there had been a session prior to the pandemic with engagement on the principles of the draft Civil Society Strategy and that it was important the strategy be taken forward, drawing on the lessons from the pandemic.

2) Mr Hill said that a great deal of work had been done in the previous year to support and engage with voluntary sector. KCC had directly supported the sector during the pandemic and progress had been made in engaging with voluntary sector. A long-term plan had been developed to support the sector and this would be embedded in the Civil Society Strategy. The innovative Crowd Funding Initiative had been popular and effective.

3) Mr Whittle said that this work had built on the commitment to strengthen links with the voluntary sector as a whole. The majority of voluntary sector services do not provide services for KCC. The Covid-19 pandemic allowed KCC to accelerate relationships in a way that had not been anticipated and in many respects, activity was ahead of where the strategy was.

4) Ms Jackson said that the report set out the offer of support to the voluntary sector for the following 12 months and the roadmap to revising the Civil Society Strategy, which has been developed in 2019. The Civil Society Strategy was a significant political priority and the infrastructure budget to support the voluntary sector or 'civil society' was not a statutory requirement but was a significant contribution to the sector. This reflected the role that the sector had played in the pandemic and the role it played in the community. Close work had been undertaken via the VCS recovery cell that had been set up as part of the Kent Resilience Forum and this had improved partnership working. A Strategic Partnership Board had been established with the NHS, district and borough councils and representatives from the voluntary sector. There was also a VCS steering group made up of representatives from across the sector. Engagement forums were to set to continue to evolve.

The Strategic Recovery Fund was to provide access to support for the sector with organisational plans and strategies, digital support, diversification of income and to support volunteering. There were plans to work with volunteer centres who had provided insight into Kent's communities and volunteers over the previous year.

Crowdfund Kent was launched in March 2021 and it was part of the Covid-19 recovery. 28 projects had received pledged funding to a value of £130,000 but the total value of those projects was £550,000. The crowdfunding approach had allowed KCC to support projects backed by their local communities. If it was successful, it was planned that crowdfunding be embedded beyond the 2 year pilot.

The Civil Strategy once agreed was to set out KCC's long term commitments against the strategy framework and the budget was to be aligned over the 3 year cycle.

5) RESOLVED to agree the recommendations set out in the report.