

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 21 April 2022.

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

8. Apologies

(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Prendergast for whom Ms Hamilton was present.

9. Cabinet Member Updates

(Item 3)

1) Ms Hamilton gave an update on behalf of Mrs Prendergast.

All staff and children were welcomed back to schools and early years settings. Schools were managing varying ranges of Covid-19 infection amongst staff, whilst also preparing for examinations at the end of the term. Thanks were given to all staff and governors for their hard work over the first two terms of the school year and best wishes were offered for the term ahead.

Families in Kent found out on Tuesday, 19 April, which primary schools their children had been offered to join in September. 9 out of 10 had been offered their first preference. It was appreciated that it was a disappointing and concerning time for those pupils and their families who did not secure their preferences, but they were urged not to be discouraged as many pupils were to secure places through the waiting list and re-allocation process. Parents and guardians were advised that a specialist team at KCC were on hand to help make the most of the options available. Colleagues within the admissions team had already been working hard to address queries from parents.

In respect of arrivals from Ukraine, officers had continued to work to ensure families were supported and that children could access school places.

The government had committed that the first part of the UK Prosperity Fund was to be given to the Multiply Programme, with £599 million in funding available. Multiply had the potential to reach adults in the whole of the UK to improve their numeracy skills. This would also support the government's 'Levelling Up' agenda and KCC, via the Community Learning Service, was to be part of this work. It was to take place over the next 3 years delivering £7.5 million of innovative activities to ensure Kent's population had the correct opportunities and skills to succeed in life.

2) Mr Brazier said work had been ongoing on SEND transport. All interested parties could now access a daily Situation Report (sitrep) to monitor the number of pupils on

the transport scheme, new entries to the scheme in any month and the number of matters in contention. In excess of 1200 were unallocated on 11 February 2022, 98% of all applicants were now allocated. There were 4 complaints about quality of service which was within the scope of normal business. A great effort had been made by officers and Members but Mr Brazier was not satisfied that the system was working as well as it should or could. The internal investigation was to begin. There were an average of 100 entrants to SEND transport every month and this was causing concern about future capacity.

There was a consultation on 48 bus services currently supported by KCC and there had been more than 2000 responses. The consultation ended on 20 April and the results were to be analysed. The commercial operators were 'handing back' services that were no longer profitable and many residents believed KCC should adopt the services. The Bus Recovery Grant was to expire in 2022 and there would be further lost services.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) allocations had been announced by the Department for Transport (DfT). KCC had been awarded £35.1 million which was much less than bid for but this was more than was expected. Many local authorities had received no allocation at all. KCC had an allocation of £24 million capital and £11 million revenue. KCC had to prepare a meaningful proposal for spending the allocations and would need to make a presentation to the DfT. It would not be possible to use any of the revenue to support Kent's existing portfolio of supported services. The DfT was excited for the future of the bus industry. A grant for £11 million had been secured for re-surfacing of 110 miles of highway in Kent and work was to be carried out before September 2022.

3) Miss Carey said thanks to the Environment and Waste Management teams for a continued high level of performance across Kent. KCC's 19th Household Waste and Recycling Centre was to have an official opening on 5 May 2022 and would be open to the public on 9 May 2022. There had long been an ambition to open a centre to serve the area around Tonbridge and Malling. The new centre would be at Allington and was a state of the art facility with many environmental features such as solar panels and rainwater harvesting, while the approach road had been made from recycled materials.

The government was conducting a consultation on waste management, looking at booking systems and charging for non-household waste. KCC had already consulted in Kent and had a good response and had settled policies. This put KCC in a good position to respond to the government's consultation and it was felt there was a strong case that Kent's policies were best practice and should carry on.

In the first round of the Solar Together scheme, 4000 households had registered their interest and this had resulted in 400-500 schemes going ahead. As part of the second round, 11,508 had registered interest and it was anticipated that a similar proportion would go ahead with the work. Companies had been selected to do the work and households would receive around 28% discount in comparison to the normal rate for the same work. The numbers going ahead with the solar panel work would be reported back.

4) Mr Murphy said KCC had been in conversations with partners at Visit Kent and Locate in Kent about the impact of the recent traffic congestion on local businesses.

Work was undertaken to understand the impact of Operation Brock and P&O ferries not operating. Consideration was being given to how mitigate the impact on the county's businesses. It had been indicated that despite these events relating to the Port at Dover, there had not been a negative effect on businesses wishing to locate in Kent. Over the Easter holidays, Visit Kent had indicated that tourist numbers had improved in line with what had been forecast.

On 27 April, Mr Murphy was to attend a jobs fair organised by Dover District Council and the Kent area team at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The fair was open to everybody looking for work but with a strong focus on those who had lost jobs at P&O Ferries. Hundreds of jobs were to be on offer along with opportunities in skills training and education. Local employers, training and education providers were to be present along with welfare advice services.

The DWP had said that there had been very few claimants from P&O Ferries as many had chosen redundancy payments which would take them over the threshold for them to claim benefits. Thanet Job Centre Plus had also arranged further 'job club' events in cooperation with East Kent College. These were open to all but with priority given to former P&O Ferries staff.

Dover District Council (DDC) was preparing for the 1 July opening of the Dover Port Health Facility. However, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had not commented on potential delay to the checking of animal-based products through the Port of Dover and it was likely that an announcement was to be made regarding any changes to the 'go live' date. DDC had regrettably had to pause general recruitment. To date, they had recruited 124 new employees, inclusive of vets, IT staff, legal and finance officers. Work was also progressing on the separate HM Revenues & Customs site at Dover which was expected to 'go live' in 2023.

Discovery Park at Sandwich had announced that they intended to become a Centre of Excellence for biotechnology in the south east. A new incubator premises, funded by the government's Getting Building Fund and backed by The South East Local Enterprise Partnership, Kent and Medway Economic Partnership and KCC was to start construction. Accommodation for around 30 companies would be provided. This was the first unit of its kind outside of Scotland.

Mr Murphy was to visit Romney Marsh with the local KCC Member on 28 April to get a better understanding of economic issues impacting the area, focusing on the announcement of the closure of the existing power station. The government had announced that the Nuclear Power Watchdog was to start the UK approval process after Rolls Royce won a £200 million grant to develop the country's first small nuclear reactors (SNRs). Rolls Royce expected that the regulatory process would be completed by the middle of 2024. Work was being undertaken to promote Dungeness as a site for the SNRs with Rolls Royce and local MPs. Each 470 MW unit cost approximately £1.8 billion and would be built on a 10-acre site. This was enough to provide enough to power 1.3 million homes annually.

5) Mr Hill highlighted the work of Kent Film Office and said that there were a number of films being shot in Kent. Films were being shot in Gravesham, Ramsgate, Dartford, Herne Bay, Chatham Dockyard in Medway and most recently, Margate. Mr Hill went to Margate and visited the set of The Empire of Light which had been erected at Dreamland. Mr Hill spoke with the producer and set designers and they had given

feedback about the support of the Kent Film Office. The Empire of Light was to be released in cinemas later in the year.

6) Mr Sweetland said the People Strategy for 2022-2027 had been finalised, following a good conversation and cross-party agreement at Personnel Committee. The Strategy set out how KCC would achieve the aim of supporting staff to work to the best of their ability and to ensure KCC did the right things as an employer, to ensure effective delivery across all council services. KCC was and would continue to be an inclusive employer where differences were valued and where staff had a sense of belonging and trust in the organisation. KCC had continued to provide a safe and supportive working environment. Thanks were given to Paul Royel and his team for great work on the Strategy.

Work was ongoing to support those coming from Ukraine. Cantium Business Solutions were commissioned to undertake DBS checks including ID verification for sponsors and households. KCC had interpreted and applied the complexities of the DBS regulations and government guidance to ensure compliance and to streamline the process for applicants as much as possible.

Information to support both Ukrainians and those wishing to act as sponsors was being constantly updated on KCC's website.

The Communications Team had supported announcements on School Offer Day.

There were a number of KCC consultations and Members were encouraged to look at these on the KCC website.

7) Mr Oakford said thanked Mrs Cooke and wished her well during her maternity leave. John Betts was joining KCC while Mrs Cooke was on maternity leave.

10. Support for Ukrainian refugees in Kent

(Item 4)

Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure and Ben Watts, General Counsel were in attendance for this item.

1) Ms Spore outlined the presentation (attached).

2) In response to questions and comments, it was noted:

- Thanks were given to Ms Spore, her team and KCC's partners for their work on supporting Ukrainian refugees in Kent
- The quality of information relating to potential sponsors was very important. There were concerns that local authorities should be able to respond to placement breakdowns on a local basis. This was particularly important for children placed in schools.
- The shared Home Office information indicated there had been 260 arrivals in Kent. This was notional and it was not known if they remained in Kent so it was being established where they were. The numbers were due to increase significantly.

- 'Heat maps' were to be used to show where guests were in the county. This would be used to help establish where school places were needed, for example.
- Systems were being developed to protect both Ukrainian guests and sponsors. There were challenges around how contact was made with arrivals. Once the initial checks had been undertaken, continued support would be needed.
- It was recognised that this was an emergency situation, and the associated risks were acknowledged. Further guidance was needed from government and work was ongoing to seek clarifications as there were a range of statutory duties that continued to apply in relation to Ukrainian guests in Kent.

3) RESOLVED to note the update.

11. Operation Brock and traffic disruption

(Item 5)

Toby Howe, Senior Highways Manager and Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport were in attendance for this item.

1) Mr Jones introduced the item.

2) Mr Howe outlined the presentation (attached).

3) Further to questions and comments it was noted:

- It was acknowledged it was a fundamentally unsustainable situation. The government was alert to the issues around traffic disruption in Kent and commitments had been made. A countywide plan was needed which set out what was most important.
- Action was taken so that emergency gas works were done at pace in order that the traffic was able to flow on the affected routes over the Easter bank holiday.
- Some direct costs were funded from the Kent Resilience Forum and the department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). However, there were costs incurred by KCC in resources and there were secondary costs to KCC and Kent from traffic disruption. It was acknowledged that while the traffic controls at Brenley Corner had assisted with some impacts, it had negatively affected seasonal tourism and local roads.
- Communications messages were to be strengthened and Members had been receiving updates from the Strategic Group. A more consistent, 'one voice' approach had been used to share information with the community.
- Connected lorry parks and holding areas were considered to be an aspirational longer-term solution as well as utilising technology for frictionless borders and freight. Structured conversations were needed with government to establish and progress proposals. The application of any learning points from previous traffic disruption events and ameliorative measures were needed for disruption events in the shorter term.

4) RESOLVED to note the presentation.

12. People at the Heart of Care - Adult Social Care White Paper

(Item 6)

Michael Thomas-Sam, Strategic Business Adviser and Paula Parker, Head of Business Delivery were in attendance for this item.

1) Mrs Bell introduced the report.

2) Mr Thomas-Sam outlined the report. The White Paper was an ambitious 10-year vision, some elements of which would be implemented before others. The 'Fair Cost of Care' exercise was to be completed by September 2022, with one part of this relying on a tool from government which was not available until the end of May 2022. This left KCC with less than 3 months to complete the exercise and go through the governance process.

The policy commitments in the White Paper related to giving people choice and control, improving standards and quality of care, support or unpaid carers and moving ahead health and social care integration, were welcomed.

3) Further to comments and questions, it was noted:

- Concerns had been raised that the Social Care Reform impact assessment had not adequately factored in the cost and impact on KCC and on providers. There was indicative funding for the next 2 years and clear and robust evidence was needed to shift the government's position. It was important that the information from the CCM and LaingBuisson report was appreciated by government and that opportunities were seized to make the case for additional funding.
- It was proposed that the report be sent to MPs with a covering letter to ensure that MPs were made aware of the risks.

4) RESOLVED to note and endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report.