

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 6 June 2023.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr N J Collor, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Rich Lehmann, Mr H Rayner and Dr L Sullivan

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer), Mr S Mitchell (Senior Commissioner), Mr R Smith (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health) and Mr M Guest (Strategic Commissioning Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item)*

The following declarations were received:

Mr Collor declared on item C2 that he was a member of the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee.

Dr Sullivan declared on item C1 that she was a Cabinet Member on Gravesham Borough Council.

Mr Lehmann declared on item C1 that he was a member of Swale borough council.

2. Minutes of the meetings held on 23 February and 20 April 2023 *(Item A4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 February & 20 April 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Kent Homeless Connect: Transition Update *(Item C1)*

Mrs Clair Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health), Mr Richard Smith (Corporate Director Adult Social Care & Health), Mr Simon Mitchell (Interim Head of Adults Commissioning) and Mr Max Guest (Strategic Commissioning Officer) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item. She discussed the decision set out in the 2022/23 budget not to continue the contract for the Kent Homeless Connect service. Part of this decision was the establishment of an 18-month transition period with up to £4.5 million of funding which would be split into three stages. Mrs Bell explained that KCC had been working with district councils during the transition to ensure that aspects of the service could continue to be delivered by them as the responsible housing authorities.

2. Members asked the following questions and made comments to Mrs Bell, Mr Smith, Mr Mitchell and Mr Guest:
 - a) A Member asked several questions on what the implications of the decision to end the Homeless Connect service had been, how the decision had impacted other KCC services and what intelligence mapping had taken place. Mr Guest told Members that care-package assessments were underway for all those deemed eligible for support from Adult Social Care but said it was too early to identify the impact of these assessments. He said the assessments would mitigate the impact of the decision by providing alternative sources of support and accommodation to existing service users. On whether the decision would impact other services, Mr Guest said all service commissioners had been made aware of the decision in 2022 and regular updates had been provided to them. Mr Smith added that KCC's 24 community teams would be working with partners including the district councils to support vulnerable individuals. He told Members that Kent's mental health services had seen a greater demand recently but noted that the cost-of-living crisis and other national factors had contributed to this. Mr Smith reminded Members of KCC's support for vulnerable people including the Live Well Kent Service which provided support, information and advice to those with mental health support needs. He also told Members that he had tasked his Assistant Directors with screening users of the Homeless Connect to see if they were eligible for Care Act services.
 - b) The Chairman added his concerns over the number of rough sleepers on highstreets in Kent. He asked whether the Xantura system, established by Maidstone Borough Council, had been proactive and preventative. Mrs Bell told Members that it was her understanding that the Xantura system had been working well. Whilst agreeing with the Chairman's concerns about rough sleeping, she reminded Members that housing was the responsibility of district councils, and that the Government had made additional funding available to them in recent years. Mr Guest gave a brief overview of the Xantura system. He explained that it mapped risk indicators of homelessness and identified an appropriate route for those individuals. The Chairman noted that this may be a topic of interest for future meetings.
 - c) A Member raised concerns about the amount of money provided to district councils to address homelessness and asked what representations Mrs Bell had made to central government to ensure there was enough funding to support homelessness.
 - d) In response to a question Mrs Bell confirmed that savings from ending the Homeless Connect Service were approximately £5 million a year.
 - e) A Member asked what would happen to the supported accommodation once funding ceased in March 2024. Mrs Bell explained this was a difficult aspect of the transition and Mr Mitchell confirmed that plans were still being developed and that, as and when they were available, they would be shared with the Committee.
 - f) A Member raised doubts over the official rough sleeper estimates. Asked if KCC and the District councils underestimated the number of rough sleepers, Mrs Bell told Members that KCC did not collect these statistics, as it was the responsibility of the district councils, this

information could, however, be requested from them. Mr Mitchell explained that district and borough councils fed information into central government and Mr Guest said that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities carried out a street count of rough sleepers annually.

- g) A Member asked for an assurance that no funds would be paid out of the 23/24 budget following cessation of the programme. Mrs Bell confirmed this was correct.
- h) A Member asked whether KCC would scrutinise the actions of district councils following the cessation of the Homelessness Connect service when it comes to the use of the transition funding. Mrs Bell told Members that it was not the County Council's role to enforce this as it was the district council's responsibility but as an adult social care provider, KCC would liaise with district councils to ensure that vulnerable people continued to access services. Mr Mitchell clarified to Members that funding was being provided to third party contractors and not to district councils during the transition period and that this was scrutinised through contractual obligations. In response to a question Mrs Bell confirmed that she was satisfied with the transition arrangements.
- i) Returning to the topic of how rough sleepers were counted, a Member explained that the criteria was often different per organisation and did change. They expressed concerns over the reliability of estimates and asked if a report could be provided to the Committee once the programme had ceased the transition phase ended and once the data was available from the Districts, to see the impact of the decision.
- j) A number of Members raised concerns over the lack of numerical data provided to the Committee in the report and the potential impacts of the decision going unscrutinised. Mrs Bell reiterated to Members that whilst there was a role for the County Council to play, ultimately housing was the responsibility of the district councils. Mrs Bell highlighted that she was not aware of any other councils that provided this service, or at least hadn't for many years. Mrs Bell explained that it was not a statutory service, other than the Care Act Assessments. She reminded Members of the need to make savings in the budget and to focus on statutory requirements. She elaborated that the phased approach was to ensure district councils and KCC had time to mitigate negative impacts and to ensure that the contract didn't end suddenly. Significant funding was provided to work through the transition with District colleagues and providers to ensure people got the support they need. A member asked about the re-purposing of the properties. On the properties currently used by the service, Mr Mitchell told Members that as the properties were not KCCs but were owned by private landlords or contractors and delivered as part of the contract, the outcome would vary and be subject to negotiations.
- k) A Member told the Committee that he was concerned that at the end of first phase no impact report had been produced. He told the Committee he'd have liked to have seen more feedback on how the first phase had proceeded and whether unexpected problems had arisen. Mrs Bell confirmed that the paper was an overview and didn't provide any figures following the first phase and told the Committee that whilst the transition was still ongoing it would be difficult to provide an assessment

at this time. Mr Guest elaborated on this telling Members that impacts were incredibly challenging to measure on these processes especially when they were relying on speculative judgements into the future. They would provide an update soon and on other homelessness initiatives such as the rough sleeper's initiative and single homelessness accommodation programme.

- l) The Chairman agreed with the concerns raised by the previous Member and speculated how many people might have passed away sleeping on Kent streets since October the previous year. The Chairman invited Mrs Bell to respond. She assured Members that the decision was not taken lightly and reminded them of budget pressures. She advised that the transition plan was put in place so that a cliff edge would not be created and the transfer to districts would be as smooth as possible. She was said she was unaware of the districts reporting additional rough sleeping as a result of the termination of the contract and referred to the cost-of-living crisis which she said would inevitably be a factor in any increase in housing related problems. She reiterated that homelessness was not a statutory responsibility of Kent County Council and that district councils were the key providers of housing Mrs Bell confirmed she had communicated with the Districts before the contract ended and had met with some of the District's representatives and everyone involved had made every effort to make the best of the situation. Mrs Bell confirmed that she would provide a report to the Committee once the transition was over. The Chairman confirmed he had not suggested that there was a direct link between people losing their lives as a result of sleeping rough and the services provided by KCC.
- m) A Member asked whether the change in the administration of district councils, following elections, had impacted the transition process. Mrs Bell told Members that most of the work involved officer to officer liaison and as such the elections had not impacted the transition. Mrs Bell told Members that this would likely be discussed at Kent Leaders meetings which all the Leaders of the Districts attend and have opportunities to raise any concerns. Mrs Bell confirmed she wrote to all the Leaders and Chief Executives at the beginning of the process. Mrs Bell also clarified that she'd be willing to meet and discuss the transition with district representatives.
- n) A Member commented that Porchlight had made representations to Members when KCC first considered ending funding for the Kent Homeless Connect scheme. The Member asked if Porchlight could be contacted for feedback on the transition. Mrs Bell agreed with this suggestion and confirmed that it would be considered.
- o) A Member asked whether consideration had been given to establishing a cross-Kent homelessness approach alongside district councils to make county wide strategic decisions. Mrs Bell said that she believed the Kent Housing Group fulfilled this role and Mr Mitchell confirmed that all the district councils and KCC were represented on the Group.
- p) A Member asked why the financial implications of the decision were not set out in the report and raised their concerns about the lack of data provided on the progress of transition. The Member told the Committee that the reason this item had been requested on the agenda was to address the concerns raised in September 2022 on homelessness, of

the impact including financial impact of the decision to end funding for Homeless Connect. The Member recommended that further information be requested on the financial and social implications of the decision.

- q) A Member praised KCC for deciding to act on homelessness in the past despite it not being a statutory duty and believed that KCCs former actions had provided a good basis for moving forward. The member provided an example of great work by their District ensuring homeless people were supported during lockdown. He asked why there was such a disparity in the number of housing units provided by the various district councils.
- r) Mrs Bell responded to the previous Member's comment that the September 2022 concerns had not been raised at Scrutiny previously, Mrs Bell asked for the comments to be forwarded to her. Addressing concerns regarding the lack of financial data in the report, Mrs Bell told the Members that she took on board concerns that the update may not have been clear enough and would seek clarification on what information Members would like to see in future reports. The Chairman invited Mrs Bell and Mr Smith to conclude. Mr Smith told Members that the directorate required clarification on what information the Committee would like to see. He reiterated that it would be very difficult to make a direct link on increase in demand to other areas from this decision. Mr Smith highlighted that there was NHS involvement here and Scrutiny may wish to look at an NHS perspective as that was where an increase in demand was most likely rather than Care Act services. Mrs Bell welcomed the comments and questions and told the Committee she would be happy to help the Committee understand the subject better at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the update provided and recommends that the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health:

- a) Requests feedback from Porchlight and Look Ahead to develop future transition phases.
- b) Produces a report to Scrutiny setting out the social and financial impacts of the decision to end funding to Kent Homeless Connect.

4. Kent Adult Carers' Strategy One Year On

(Item C2)

Mrs Clair Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health), Mr Richard Smith (Corporate Director Adult Social Care & Health) and Mr Simon Mitchell (Interim Head of Adults Commissioning) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the item, explaining that the delivery plan had been co-developed with stakeholders and a key aspect of this was the establishment of the Kent Carers Forum. The Kent Adult Carers' Strategy was closely aligned with the overarching Marking a Difference Every Day Strategy for Adult Social Care.
2. Members discussed the report and asked questions to Mrs Bell, Mr Smith & Mr Mitchell, these included:

- a) A Member praised the ‘telling your story once’ initiative and highlighted the importance of effective and efficient communication.
- b) A Member asked if KCC liaised with health trusts on technology to ensure there was joined up working with compatible systems, particularly where areas of responsibility overlapped. Mrs Bell commented on the importance of a joined-up approach to technology. Mr Smith told Members that KCC worked closely with the digital lead at the NHS and that whilst services weren’t jointly commissioned steps were being taken to co-operate with the NHS on technology.
- c) A Member commended carers and raised National Carers Week.
- d) A Member asked what was prioritised in the Kent Carers Strategy and how this was decided. Mrs Bell told Members that the priorities were based on feedback from service users. The Member asked if there was data to demonstrate the progress of delivery on key priorities. Mrs Bell told Members that the strategy set out the desired outcomes, and the delivery plan explored the best ways to reach those outcomes. Mrs Bell confirmed that progress on those targets could be reported on in future.
- e) A Member highlighted the importance of carers receiving cover to allow them to take breaks and asked whether respite rates had increased recently. Mrs Bell told Members that KCC did have a contract in place which allowed carers to take short breaks. Mr Mitchell elaborated that carers could receive direct payments or get cover via the contract. A Member asked if the contract was sufficient for demand. Mr Mitchell responded that they provided this service to the carers who came forward but as not all eligible carers were known to KCC, it was not possible to assist all carers.
- f) A Member raised concerns about burnout within the carer community and asked what the impact on KCC was when a carer was no longer able to provide care. Mr Mitchell responded that when carers were unable to provide support for any reason, the person in need of care would fall under KCC’s statutory responsibility. The Member then asked if there had been an increase in this and asked for any evidence. Mr Mitchell said that it would be difficult to assess as individuals’ circumstances varied greatly. Mr Smith told Members of the importance of early investment in carers and ensuring that they were aware of the options available to them. He then spoke of the challenges of collating data across services including KCC, District Councils, GPs and the NHS.
- g) A Member asked how prevention could be evidenced and its impact assessed. Mr Smith explained that Adult Social Care was a demand driven service and that due to resource constraints KCC must identify risk and allocate resources. The Member asked how long assessments were taking and if the time taken to complete assessments impacted care. Mr Smith told Members that a range of services don’t require assessments, some require limited assessments and others in-depth assessments. He told Members the length varied across assessments, and he could not provide one specific time frame. Mr Mitchell added that the first point of contact of the carer also impacted timeframes he told Members he could gather data from KCC’s providers.
- h) A Member asked if integration between GPs, the NHS and KCC existed to assist the spouses of those suffering from dementia and flag concerns. Mrs Bell confirmed that such a link did not currently exist and expressed concerns around GDPR. She told Members that the Health Care Record was being developed to link up healthcare services. Mr Mitchell explained that a

dementia co-ordinator service had been put in place and that these co-ordinators provided support to the individual and their family.

- i) A Member asked if Mrs Bell could elaborate on what type of technology had been used or developed to assist carers. Mrs Bell told Members that sensors, movement monitors and Alexa-like devices had been utilised. Mr Mitchell said that the programme would continue to evolve over time as new technologies became available.
- j) A Member asked what support was available when it came to transport for carers. Mr Mitchell told Members that this would depend on personal circumstances but as part of the assistance they provided to carers KCC looked at the best option for each individual case.
- k) A Member raised their trepidation in noting that progress had been made given the lack of data provided to the Committee. Mrs Bell responded that whilst she understood that a lot of the work was in its infancy, that delivering in these areas was important.

RESOLVED that Committee notes the progress of the Kent Adult Carers' Strategy.

5. Work Programme

(Item D1)

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the Work Programme.