

Scrutiny Call-in Request: 23/00122 – Kent Community Warden Service Review

Proposer: Lauren Sullivan

Seconded: Antony Hook

Reasons for call-in:

17.67 (a) The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework:

- **Securing Kent's Future – Objective 2 – Delivering savings from identified opportunity areas to set a sustainable 2024/25 budget and MTFP – Service Transformation opportunities.**
- **Framing Kent's Future – New Models of Care – the Council's primary objective to meet is Best Value duties.**

Within the Securing Kent's Future paper agreed at Cabinet in October, and subsequently County Council in November, service transformation was agreed as a renewed focus on finding best value within the council and preventing duplication in service.

The Proposed Record of Decision identifies that this supports this:

'The prioritisation of New Models of Care and Support is also aligned to as Community Wardens will continue to take referrals from ASCH in the designated wards and where capacity and time allow, beyond those areas. The GAP also aligns with the new prioritisations as it utilises indicators of relevance to the significant budget pressure in ASCH care and support spend for older persons, learning disability, mental health and physical disability. Objective 2 of the Securing Kent's Future strategy includes opportunity areas to reduce future costs which are relevant to KCWS work; ASCH social care prevention and hospital discharge pathway. Due to the preventative nature of the service, attaching a monetary value of KCWS for various partners including ASCH is not a simple task but has been rigorously explored over recent years. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) discuss prevention in social care, recognising the challenges in providing evidence^[1]. With the Securing Kent's Future focus on adult social care prevention cost savings, strengthening the understanding of the link between KCWS prevention work and savings in care costs will be a priority.'

However, during the discussion the Cabinet Member, although referring to the future, confirmed that she had been pressing for data and believed it existed, to quantify the value that the Community Warden Service provided to the adult social care service, which contradicts that statement.

The Decision report refers to work being undertaken with KCC Service Kent Analytics on monetary impacts of the Community Warden Service but that was not provided with the report findings, and it would appear the Cabinet Member does not have access to this information to make an informed decision.

In relation to transformation, the Head of Service, when asked about duplication in service of the ASC Community Navigator role and the role of the Community Wardens, agreed that the roles appeared to be similar, demonstrating that this may not have been a consideration during the Appendix 2 work and once again is not in line with the Best Value duties outlined and confirmed as a priority for the Council, by failing to explore these alternatives fully.

Aligned to the commitments made within Framing Kent's Future, one of the KCC Commitments within the prioritised New Models of Care and Support is to:

'To reshape our commissioning practice to ensure we build strategic partnerships with our providers, through earlier engagement, more consistent and proactive commissioning practice, and a stronger focus on co-designing services.'

This could negate this commitment due to the lack of co-design exploration. It appears that we are redesigning the service after the event, rather than design and then implement.

17.67 (c) The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision-making set out in 8.5:

- **8.5 (a) Action proportionate to the desired outcome**
(c) Respect for human rights in all its forms
(d) A presumption in the favour of openness
(e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes

Firstly, although Cabinet Committees are advisory, debate was curtailed due to the time limitation of the Chairman and therefore a broad an open discussion was not able to be held during the time allotted.

The Budget Dashboard, created for Members to analyse budget lines but, also to explore the impacts of decisions aligned to the savings, identified that this saving was at the behest of the Corporate centre and to contribute to the wider Securing Kent's Future Strategy. Due to the preventative nature of the service, clearly laid out in the decision covering report, this is unquantifiable and although within the base budget of the service a saving is aligned, future and immediate costs could be transferred to other 'front door' services with unknown consequences and demand.

As demonstrated in section 4.2 of the decision report, the managed decline of the service, via the inevitable reduction in headcount and then standard process of vacancy management within the service, the decision has not been open and staff have sadly left before the inevitable was to happen, making the decision technically confirmed before the Cabinet Member has taken it. This has led to experienced staff, known in their communities, leaving to pursue other careers. Where is the dignity, respect and fairness in this for our valued staff. It could be argued that no other KCC service is having their role as clearly debated in public as this.

Once again KCC has consulted but held no regard to the findings of the consultation. As an example, point 2.3 of the report refers to the trust and rapport that Wardens hold demonstrating that the service and Cabinet Member recognise their value but subsequently signs off the proposal with 'no change to the proposal'.

The recently refreshed Community Safety Agreement agreed at the Crime and Disorder Committee in July 2023 clearly outlines that along with partners, KCC will do as much as possible *'to prevent problems before they arise and a great deal of effort is devoted to supporting and safeguarding vulnerable people, tackling issues of substance misuse, improving road safety, enhancing quality of life and development community resilience.'* Our Wardens contribute to all of this and although defined as a discretionary service, they fulfil certain Community Safety statutory duties. This

reduction in spend places KCC in the bottom quartile nationally for community safety spend.

The Council is a lead local flood authority with a strategic overview role for local flooding in their area under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and therefore a Risk Management Authority with one of their requirements to cooperate with other authorities and exchange information. Community Wardens play an active role in this, as well as other critical events, such as the pandemic.

This Decision is therefore not proportionate to the desired outcome due to this intelligence led service being reduced and, could in the long term be detrimental to the 2024/25 budget and MTFP due to the lack of known qualitative and quantitative impacts of the implementation of this decision.