

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### **GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 5 March 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr C Broadley, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr J P McInroy, Mr J Meade, Mr M J Sole and Mr M C Dance

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy, Mrs C Bell and Sir Paul Carter, CBE

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport) and Mr S Samson (Interim Head of Economy)

### **UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**

#### **185. Membership**

*(Item 2)*

RESOLVED to note that Mr McInroy had replaced Mr Thomas as a Member of the Committee.

#### **186. Apologies and Substitutes**

*(Item 3)*

Apologies had been received from Mr Ridgers, Mr Manion and Mr Cannon. Mr Dance was present as substitute for Mr Ridgers.

Mr Baldock was present virtually.

#### **187. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda**

*(Item 4)*

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **188. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024**

*(Item 5)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 were a correct record.

#### **189. Ebbsfleet Development Corporation - Presentation**

*(Item 6)*

*Mr Ian Piper, CEO, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and Mr Mark Pullin, Director of Planning & Place, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation were in attendance for this item.*

*Mr Conrad Broadly declared an interest that he was the Chairman of Broadness Cruising Club and Chairman of Northfleet Harbour Restoration Trust.*

1. Mr Ian Piper, CEO, and Mr Mark Pullin, Director of Planning & Place, of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation provided a presentation on Ebbsfleet Garden City (a copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes).

2. Mr Piper and Mr Pullin responded to the following questions and comments from Members:

(a) Asked whether there was a doctor's surgery in the area, Mr Pullin said the corporation worked closely with the Integrated Care Board and other healthcare providers in the area and work was ongoing in relation to facilities in Alkerden and Ebbsfleet Central.

(b) Asked about the measurement of public investment and comparisons against other development corporations, Mr Piper said the level of investment was tracked and an evaluation was likely to be carried out by central government. Mr Piper highlighted the importance of public investment scrutiny so that private investment was not displaced.

(c) Asked about the policy for active travel and affordable housing, Mr Pullin said they were working with KCC to support the expansion of Fastrack and there were various other initiatives for example Demand Response Transits. The provision of affordable housing varied across sites but was typically between 25% and 35%. Mr Piper said the neighbourhoods were designed to be walkable and Ebbsfleet aimed to achieve the right balance between parking provision and car ownership. Mr Jones referred to Kent's 'Mobility as a Service' pilot scheme which provided travel opportunities for residents and may drive behavioural change.

(d) Asked about London Resort, Mr Piper said the Development Consent Order (DCO) was withdrawn some time ago following the designation of the peninsular as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

(e) Asked about planning enforcement, Mr Pullin said planning applications were looked at with regards to sufficient resident and visitor parking and planning enforcement was carried out by management companies. The Ebbsfleet Garden City Trust had been created to oversee communities, for example, community buildings, following completion of the development.

(f) A Member commented that existing Northfleet residents had not seen any tangible benefits and had lost three historic buildings, questioning whether there should be more focus on heritage. Mr Pullin outlined opportunities such as new open spaces, schools and youth provision which may help with community cohesion. Mr Pullin said his team would be looking at a heritage action plan going forward and would be reaching out to local communities.

(g) Asked about solar power in future developments, Mr Piper said this depended on EDC's direct influence in terms of land ownership, for example a complete energy strategy would be looked at for Ebbsfleet Central.

RESOLVED to note the presentation.

## **190. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director**

*(Item 7)*

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) The winter period had been busy for the registrations team with over 11,000 birth and death registrations completed between October and the end of January. Mrs Bell had visited the Ashford Gateway and Danson House in Bexley where KCC delivered registration and ceremonial events on behalf of Bexley Council.
  - (b) Virtual tours had been launched in some of KCC's libraries to showcase facilities online and help residents plan their visits. The virtual tours were viewable on the Kent Libraries website and app.
  - (c) Thursday 7 March was World Book Day and displays and activities would take place across Kent libraries, mobiles and online.
  - (d) The removal of library stock and furniture had commenced at Folkestone Library and a public consultation on the long-term options for the building would commence in Spring 2024.
  - (e) A national independent review of English public libraries had been conducted and the report was launched in February 2024. The paper raised awareness of the role of libraries and what the government could do to support and recognise them as a valuable community asset. Mrs Bell met with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS) Head of Library Strategy and Delivery and the DCMS team at the beginning of March and the national review was one of the topics discussed.
  - (f) Trading Standards were continuing to visit retailers to provide advice and guidance on vapes. Since November the team had carried out 208 advisory visits and 19 'Challenge 25' visits. The number of illegal vapes removed from the high street at the end of January stood at 2,067. The Council's Victim Safeguarding Officer dealt with 127 scam and doorstep crime victims since April last year.
2. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) The No Use Empty (NUE) Scheme had restored almost 600 empty commercial and residential properties bringing the total to 8,185 properties since its inception in 2005, and all funds for 2023/2024 had been allocated. In addition, NUE had funded 230 new build homes across eight Kent districts since 2021 and created 24 business units in Dover.

- (b) The Kent & Medway Business Fund and Regional Growth Fund had created 3,812 jobs and protected 1,477 jobs, bringing the total to 5,289. The scheme was relaunched in Autumn 2023 with money secured from government for the next ten years. Mr Murphy thanked officers for their work in securing the funding.
3. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following operational matters:
- (a) The team had been working with the Sandwich taskforce in supporting Discovery Park to enable the continuation of business activities following Pfizer's announcement last year regarding redundancies.
- (b) There had been a number of high-level entries for the Taste of Kent awards and planning arrangements for this year's Kent Invicta Chamber Business Awards in November had commenced.
- (c) Works at Margate Library were now complete including refurbishment of the children's library. Mr Jones thanked the knitting group at Clifton Library who had collectively knitted 199 little vests for the Chip Shop Babies alongside the local Women's Institute. News of this reached knitters up and down the UK and as a result, tens of thousands of vests had been knitted and sent out to needy babies around the world.
- (d) Active Kent and Medway's FANS scheme (Free Access to National Sports People) provided support to the county's leading sports performers through free, off peak access to a number of sports facilities within the county. As part of the scheme, FANS members in full-time education in Kent and Medway could apply for grant aid to help them with the costs associated with competing at national level. In the latest round of funding applications grant aid had been awarded to 30 young performers from across the county.
- (e) The latest results of the Sport England Active Lives Children and Young People Survey had been released. Nationally 47% of children and young people were meeting the Chief Medical Officer's recommended 60 minutes of sport or physical activity a day, and in Kent and Medway this was 45.2%. The research showed that inequalities remained and to help address this Active Kent and Medway facilitated a wide range of programmes including the Kent School Games and the Opening School Facilities Programme as well as working with the School Games Organiser Network and local schools to encourage the least active children to be more active.
- (f) The Coroner's Service move to their new facilities at Oakwood House was now complete with four courtrooms in use for inquests every day.
- (g) Kent Scientific Services were granted £260,000 from the Food Standards Agency. The instruments those grants had funded were now installed and delivering more efficient analysis, broadening the Council's commercial offer to clients.

- (h) Kent Trading Standards had been busy helping the farming community with bluetongue in Kent and the control zone was lifted on 19th February.

RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

**191. 24/00010 - Contracting Inward Investment and Visitor Economy Services for Kent & Medway**

*(Item 8)*

*Mr Steve Samson (Interim Head of Economy) was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Murphy explained that the contractual arrangements with Locate in Kent and Visit Kent would come to an end on 30 June and it was proposed that these services would be re-procured as a joint contract, making an annual saving to KCC of approximately £150,000.
2. Mr Steve Samson introduced the report and said the purpose of combining the service was to bring about efficiency savings with back-office operations and to ensure the services could continue in a sustainable way whilst encouraging a joint approach to providing key services that promote the county's visitor economy and inward investment opportunities. As set out in the report, both services brought a range of economic benefits for Kent and Medway.
3. Members commented on the effectiveness of a joint organisation for both services, and the importance of creating an equal balance between the two services, noting the importance of ensuring the right balance of political board members and those with business experience. Mr Murphy said discussions had taken place regarding the governance of the service going forward and it had been made clear that both services were to be taken in equal importance. He said the Council would work closely with organisations such as Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Kent Ambassadors to push the economy of Kent forward through investment industries and the visitor economy.
4. A Member asked about the effectiveness of marketing Kent to the rest of the UK and Europe. Mr Murphy said it was the Council's desire to have a stopping service at Ebbsfleet and/or Ashford International Stations and the Council was lobbying as much as it could on this. Visit Kent was measured against national KPIs and had recently won an award for best tourist attraction bodies in the United Kingdom. Once the successful organisation(s) for the contract had been appointed further information would be reported back to the cabinet committee.

RESOLVED to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development on the proposed decision to procure an Inward Investment and Visitor Economy services contract for the next two financial years and delegate to the Director Growth & Communities to take other relevant actions including but not limited to entering into required legal agreements as necessary to implement the decision.

**192. 24/00012 - Contingency contract to provide emergency facilities in the event of a mass fatality incident**

*(Item 9)*

*Mr Mark Rolfe, Interim Head of Community Protection, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and explained that the Council had a statutory duty to facilitate the Coroner's Service, and this included in the event an incident resulted in mass fatalities.
2. A Member asked how the provider would cope in the event of a national incident or one that spread across several counties, Mr Rolfe explained that organisations who provided this service tended to provide international aid and, if needed, this could become inward looking and bring help into the country. The purpose of the contract was part of a scaled response ranging from small incidents up to a full-scale emergency response requiring government military aid which could only be requested if the civil options were in place.
3. Following comments made by Members, Mrs Bell clarified that the contract was not an insurance policy and the costs of the contract, depending on circumstances, could be significant. Mr Rolfe said the contract included the payment of a retainer so that facilities could be called upon if needed and the retainer gave access to the provider's expertise and training. If an incident occurred where the contract was required to be called upon the Kent Resilience Forum Mass Fatality Plan would include a scaled response. If facilities were required that were outside of the Council's ownership and control, costs incurred would be an unfunded pressure on the Council's budget.

RESOLVED to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposed decision to delegate authority to the Director of Growth & Communities to take any necessary actions to enter into a contract for the provision of emergency facilities, including mortuary facilities, in the event of a mass fatality incident.

**193. 24/00014 - Signing of Memorandum of Understanding as prerequisite to access funding to deliver a Nutrient Neutrality Strategy in East Kent**  
*(Item 10)*

*Mr Max Tant, Flood and Water Manager, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Murphy explained that the government was offering £9.8m of capital for nutrient neutrality mitigation in East Kent along with revenue grants to support the delivery of a strategy.
2. Mr Tant introduced the report and explained that nutrient neutrality was an issue in East Kent that had been holding up development for almost four years. To access the government funding and the revenue grants the Council was required to sign Memorandums of Understanding. Mr Tant highlighted that the revenue funding was only available during this financial year and a strategy would be developed to deliver nutrient mitigation with the capital funding.
3. Mr Sole declared an interest in that he was a Councillor at Canterbury City Council.

4. Following a question from a Member, Mr Tant explained that all developments in the affected area had to be nutrient neutral. Some large developments were able to invest in onsite wastewater treatment works to achieve this, but this option was not available to smaller developments. A strategic mitigation solution was therefore required within the catchment.

RESOLVED to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development on the proposed decision to:

- (i) AGREE to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to accept £9.8m capital and Memorandums of Understanding for supporting revenue funding from DLUHC to support nutrient neutrality mitigation works in East Kent.
- (ii) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, and Corporate Director of Finance, to review and agree to the required terms and conditions to enter into the necessary grant arrangements.
- (iii) AGREE for the Director for Growth and Communities to bring a strategy for delivery of nutrient neutrality for adoption to this Committee prior to claiming the capital funding.

#### **194. Risk Management: Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate** (Item 11)

*Mr Mark Scrivener, Head of Risk and Delivery Assurance was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Scrivener introduced the report which included 3 risks on the Corporate Risk Register and a summary of key risks from within the Growth, Environment and Transport directorate. Mr Scrivener explained that some of the target risk ratings had increased taking into account that some risks were outside the Council's direct control and unlimited resources were not available to manage them.
2. A Member asked about CRR0042 – *Border fluidity, infrastructure, and regulatory arrangements* – and whether there was any update, Mr Murphy said an announcement was expected from central government in August/September 2024 and Mr Jones said the Entry/Exit System would be discussed at the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee on 7 March 2024.
3. A Member asked whether the Developers Contribution Guide would resolve issues relating to the financing of infrastructure, Mr Jones said there would always be a question around a developer's viability, but the guide aimed to strengthen the Council's position in securing the right infrastructure on the right sites at the right time.

RESOLVED to note the report.

#### **195. Kent & Medway Business Fund Bi-Annual Monitoring - Quarter 2 2023-24** (Item 12)

*Mr Martyn Riley, Project Manager, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Murphy paid tribute to Ms Susan Berdo and her team for their work in securing the funds for the next ten years following a suspension by government in late 2023.
2. Mr Riley introduced the report which summarised the results of KCC's monitoring returns from businesses that had received loans and equity from KCC managed government funded Business Investment Schemes, consisting of the current Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) scheme and the former Regional Growth Fund (RGF) schemes.

RESOLVED to note the report.

### **196. Update on Transition of Local Enterprise Partnership Responsibilities to Kent County Council**

*(Item 13)*

1. Mr Samson introduced the report, reminded Members of the areas of responsibility that were being transferred from government to Kent County Council for the Functional Economic Area of Kent & Medway. He said the Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) would become the local growth board for Kent and Medway and would oversee economic growth activities in Kent and Medway based on the priorities and objectives set out in the Kent and Medway Economic Framework which is a strategy that will be recognised by government. Mr Samson said that some funding would be available from government to support the transfer of responsibilities to KCC for 2024/25.
2. A Member asked about democratic control and the balance of businesspeople and elected members on the board once the responsibilities had been transferred, Mr Samson said the guidance for LEP transition published at the end of 2023 by central government did not specify a requirement to have a certain public-private sector split, but ensuring the right balance of business membership would be discussed at future meetings of the KMEP and Kent Leaders. It was proposed that a KMEP Investment Panel would ensure full accountability for the use of government funding that might be announced.

RESOLVED to note the report.

### **197. Impacts of new border controls on Trading Standards activities**

*(Item 14)*

*Mr Steve Rock, Head of Trading Standards, was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Rock introduced the report and provided a presentation by way of a series of slides (attached to these minutes).
2. A Member asked about funding for the service at the border, Mr Rock said Port Health was responsible for funding the service in relation to food and the Council was responsible for feed with the costs (including officer time and analysis) being rechargeable to the importer.

3. Asked about the costs to the Council, Mr Rock said grant funding for product safety was received from the Office of Product Safety and Standards. Nothing had yet been received from Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and it was not possible to know what the level of feed or live animals would be.
4. Asked about the inspection process, Mr Rock said the checks were made on a percentage basis at the Border Control Post. There were financial implications for non-attendance and criminal penalties for failing to comply with some directions. Mr Rolfe said to get access to market the importers needed evidence that the goods had been through the control centre.

RESOLVED to note the report.

#### **198. Work Programme 2024**

*(Item 15)*

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.