

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 9 July 2024.

PRESENT: Mr S Holden (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mr T Bond, Mr T Cannon, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms M Dawkins, Mr M Dendor, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr H Rayner, Mr D Robey and Mr A Sandhu, MBE

ALSO PRESENT: Mr N Baker and Mr R Thomas

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Mr Hills was in present virtually and Mr Baldock joined the meeting virtually at 12:30pm.

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 21 May 2024 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

4. Southern Water presentation

(Item 13)

Angus Cramp and John Mealey from Southern Water presented to the committee (presentation attached).

5. Directorate Dashboard

(Item 5)

Matt Wagner, Interim Chief Analyst was in attendance for this item

1) Mr Wagner introduced the report and said that it was the first dashboard for 2024/25. There were 17 key performance indicators (KPIs); 12 were rated green, 5 were rated amber and none were rated red.

EW1 : Percentage of statutory planning consultee responses submitted within 21 days had wrongly been marked as rated green in the summary on page 3 of Appendix 1. It was correctly marked as rated amber in the detailed section on page 8.

2) RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard.

6. Verbal Updates from Cabinet Members and Corporate Director *(Item 6)*

1) Mr Thomas announced that the build of the Sevenoaks Dunbrick Waste Transfer Station was nearing completion and was to become operational by mid-September. The build commenced in July 2023 and the development was secured through a new leasing arrangement, which would enable sustainable waste disposal operations. With enhanced capacity that was fit for purpose, whilst accommodating government's future legislative changes, it was designed to enable the recycling of more waste streams collected at the kerbside by Sevenoaks District Council and to ensure the statutory requirement of both disposal and collection authorities was met. The facility was to be officially opened by the KCC Chairman in early September.

KCC continued to expand its reuse activities at the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), collecting items in reuse containers at 8 of the HWRCs. In 2023, KCC diverted more than 156 tonnes to reuse. Working in partnership with Adult Social Care, the NHS and NRS Healthcare KCC had been trialling collecting care equipment such as walking sticks and frames at 4 of the HWRCs, last year recycling and reusing over 1,000 items. This was to be expanded to a further 2 HWRCs shortly. Finally, FCC had sent initial engagement packs out to find a charity partner to run KCC's first ever reuse shop at the Allington HWRC.

As part of World Environment Day on 5 June, the Resource Management and Circular Economy Team undertook a volunteering day at the Church Marshes closed landfill site and Milton Creek Country Park next door.

The team were keen to support KCC's environmental aims and carried out a litter pick and reed planting on site, as well as a guided nature walk led by one of the team to inform about the local biodiversity initiatives that had been undertaken.

The team had a duty to manage the closed site, and reed planting was part of a wastewater treatment system that helps protect and enhance the environment of the area. On the guided walk, the team could see the importance of pollinators as highlighted in our Plan Bee and left the day considering where wildflowers could be encouraged to grow on other areas of KCC's estate.

Simon Springate, joined KCC at the beginning of July as the new Plan Bee Officer. The post was still seconded from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, but had been made full time.

The Plan Tree Team capped off a fantastic season by planting another 40 rare, heritage variety, fruit trees from the highly esteemed National Fruit Collection (Grow at Brogdale) in schools and community orchards. The Team was also revisiting a sample of planting sites from the last three years of the Local Authority Treescape Fund to assess survival rates and increased biodiversity at the sites.

The decline of mature elm trees had also led to a decline in the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly. The Plan Tree Team would be joining forces with butterfly conservationists to record both the numbers of elms and butterflies across Kent. Mr Thomas invited Members to help with collecting photographs and locations in their areas.

The Kent Downs National Landscape Team was thrilled to announce the launch of a new project to map the heritage ponds of the Kent Downs area funded through the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)'s Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Nationally, around 75% of ponds had disappeared in the last 100 years. By mapping these heritage ponds, the project aims to reveal long-forgotten sites that are essential for wildlife. The team was inviting all those fascinated by local stories and old maps to become a Heritage Ponds Volunteer and dive deep into the murky waters of the past. No experience was necessary, as training would be provided.

2) Mr Baker extended his congratulations to Helen Rowe who was KCC's Structures and Tunnels Asset Manager. Ms Rowe had been included in the Women's Engineering Society's Top 50 Women in Engineering (WE50) list of winners for 2024.

The yearly award took place every International Women in Engineering Day on 23 June and celebrated women who were trailblazers in the world of engineering.

The Pot Hole Blitz 2024 project (worth £8.6 million) was in its third month and was progressing well. As of 21 June 2024;

- The total meterage of patching delivered is 138,557.61, and
- Total potholes filled was 4110
- 77% of the works had now been raised and passed to the local contractors
- 62% of the works had been completed on the network
- Works were to continue into mid-October

KCC was also delivering a £40 million road surfacing programme this year to resurface our roads and footways. By the end of June, our teams have delivered around £15.5 million of road surfacing works covering around 350,000 square metres of Kent's roads, and also delivering £1.5m of footway surfacing programme improving around 42,000 square metres of Kent's pavements.

There was no confirmed date for the implementation of the Entry Exit System (EES). KCC were working towards 6 October as a probable date. As a partner was the Kent & Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF) KCC continued to prepare for implementation date, revising Business Continuity Plans to take account of the expected impacts on Kent, however, a 'Reasonable Worst Case Scenario' was awaited to enable targeted planning.

Eurotunnel were continuing to develop the terminal at Cheriton with kiosks for UK nationals to register before heading to Europe. The Port Of Dover was developing an area with kiosks to process coaches, and the buffer zone prior to French customs to enable registration for car users, however, they did not have space for kiosks and hand held devices would be used by officers to register car occupants.

Using Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding, KCC were to deliver three major bus priority schemes at Rennie Drive in Dartford, Pencester Road in Dover and a wider scheme of initiatives supporting the Stagecoach Thanet Loop service. All three schemes had been approved and were to be delivered on the ground by the end of 2024/25.

Following the update report to the County Council in May, the new Local Transport Plan 5 was to go out to public consultation later in July. Ahead of the public consultation, there was an all-Member briefing on the draft plan on Friday, 12 July at 10am on TEAMS. Members were encouraged to attend.

Once it was launched, the consultation was to last for 12 weeks, and public exhibition events were scheduled in each district in addition to the online materials that would be available. This would give the public the opportunity to learn about our transport priorities, ask questions and respond with their views. Responses would be analysed, and a post-consultation revised Local Transport Plan was to be put to the County Council for adoption by the end of the year.

3) Mr Jones said from 11 July, Operation Brock was to be implemented to mitigate increased traffic pressures at Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover.

Officers were keenly aware of the disruptive impact traffic congestion had on the residents of Dover and Folkestone and on 8 July, in Mr Jones' capacity as the Strategic Lead for the Kent & Medway Resilience Forum, he sent a letter to all KCC Members and residents in Dover and Folkestone & Hythe providing assurances about the measures KCC had at their disposal to manage traffic disruption, if needed. The letter also sought to reassure local people that emergency services had plans in place to get to anyone that needs them, however bad the traffic might be.

There were also details in the letter about the new permit system introduced at the front of Operation Brock, which aimed at preventing freight drivers from dodging the queues in the contraflow as they went through Kent to cross the channel. Non-compliance was found to be a huge contributing factor in the disruption over the May bank holiday weekend. It was hoped that the new permit system would reduce the need for sudden closures of the Dover-bound A20 Roundhill Tunnel at Folkestone and help to keep local roads flowing more freely in busy periods.

In early June, an inspection at Chestfield Tunnel revealed that 10 jet fans in the tunnel had failed. The fans were essential for clearing smoke and ensuring safe evacuation and emergency access. On 11 June, engineers worked for 22 hours to repair and replace fans in the London-bound bore to enable it to open within two days rather than the anticipated five days. The coast-bound bore remained closed whilst a ventilation engineering specialist was sourced to redesign the fan system and procure replacements.

A decision on the Lower Thames Crossing application was due by 20 June. However, due to the general election, the decision had been postponed until 4 October. It remained to be seen if there would be any further consultations before the (new) Secretary of State takes their decision. There would then be a 6-week period when people could challenge the decision in the High Court through a Judicial Review. If the Lower Thames Crossing was granted consent, construction would be able to start in 2026 and the scheme be open for traffic in 2032.

The Examination of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application by Gatwick Airport for routine use of its standby northern runway had been ongoing since February and was due to conclude by the end of August. Kent County Council was opposed to the expansion of Gatwick as set out in policy on Gatwick Airport which had been in place for nearly 10 years following its adoption by the Cabinet back in December 2014. This opposition was based on the noise impacts in west Kent being made worse by an increase in flights that will be brought about by Gatwick becoming a dual runway airport. Currently, the northern runway was only used for emergencies or when the main runway is closed for maintenance.

On Friday, 28 June we had a Big GET Together, at Manor Park Country Park, West Malling where 60 staff from all areas of GET worked with our park rangers on clearing spear thistles from an area of grassland. The thistles were an invasive species that dominated the area so removing them supported biodiversity by allowing wildflowers & invertebrates to thrive. In 2 hours, officers cleared approximately 400 square metres (equivalent to around 1.5 tennis courts).

Explore Kent had a new Junior Cycling Challenge to encourage families

to cycle in the summer holidays. Young explorers could take part in the Explore Kent Junior Cycling Challenge and earn a reward for their cycling adventures. They could mark their achievement with the free Junior Cycling Challenge certificates.

Congratulations were given to Helen Rowe, Structures and Tunnels Asset Manager and Fiona Paine, Structures Programme Manager (Development) for their recent success in the Women's Engineering Society's Top 50 Women in Engineering (WE50) list of winners

7. 24/00067 - Kent County Council Adoption of the 4th Revision of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2024- 2029
(Item 7)

Helen Shulver, Head of Environment and Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.

2) Ms Shulver outlined the report.

3) Further to Members' comments, it was noted that:

- There were concerns about the decline in biodiversity, pollution and housing developments on the High Weald.

4) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report.

8. Annual Update on the Energy and Low Emissions Strategy
(Item 8)

Helen Shulver, Head of Environment and Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy were in attendance for this item

1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.

2) Further to Members' questions, it was noted that:

- LoCASE funding had ceased, and work was being undertaken to identify funding opportunities to support low carbon projects for businesses and a green finance strategy was being explored.
- KCC were awaiting information about how county councils were to assist the government to meet legally binding commitments relating to the Net Zero. KCC also awaited information about the new government's approach to nuclear energy and how this would affect Dungeness as a site for new nuclear energy.

3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report.

9. 24/00064 - Contract extension for the receipt and processing of organic waste in south west Kent (including Maidstone green waste) - (GW/2004/01)
(Item 9)

- 1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.
- 2) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations.

10. 24/00066 - Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
(Item 10)

Max Tant, Flood and Water Manager and Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy were in attendance for this item

- 1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.
- 2) Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:
 - Concerns were raised about a lack of joint approach with other agencies and related plans. Some Members felt there was an opportunity for the strategy to have a broader scope.

- 2) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report.

11. 24/00065 - Mixed Dry Recycling Contract
(Item 11)

Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy was in attendance for this item

- 1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.
- 2) Further to questions from Members, it was noted that:
 - In the longer term, other options could be explored if circumstances changed but it was considered that the contract was the most advantageous way for the waste to be processed.
 - It was requested that the contract be discussed at the end of the 2 year period to see how well it has worked.

- 3) RESOLVED to endorse the recommendations as outlined in the report.

12. 24/00068 - KCC Heritage Conservation Strategy Revision - Change to Windmills Policy
(Item 12)

Lis Dyson, Heritage Conservation Manager and, Matthew Smyth, Director for Environment and Circular Economy were in attendance for this item

- 1) Mr Thomas introduced the report.
- 2) Mr Lewis proposed a motion and Mr Hood seconded:

i) That it be noted that the consultation undertaken shows 87% of 2,330 responses opposed the proposal to find alternative arrangements for the ownership and/or financial responsibility for KCC owned windmills.

ii) The committee strongly recommend the continuation of KCC's successful custodianship as the best way of securing their future;

And;

iii) that the strategy remains unchanged and the proposal for divestment of the assets is dropped.

3) Following debate, the motion was put to the vote and was declared LOST.

4) It was then proposed by Mr Rayner and seconded by Mr Dendor that the committee endorse the recommendation as outlined in the report. Members requested a recorded vote and the voting was as follows:

For (8)

Mr Harry Rayner
Mr Crow Brown
Mr Dendor
Mr Robey
Mr Sandhu
Mr Bond
Mr Collor
Mr Hills

Against (6)

Mr Baldock
Mr Chittenden
Ms Dawkins
Mr Holden
Mr Hood
Mr Lewis

Abstain (0)

5) The motion was declared CARRIED.

13. Work Programme *(Item 14)*

RESOLVED to note the work programme.

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