

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 Thursday, 19 September 2024.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Baldock (virtual)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Bond and Mr Smyth whom Ms Shulver was substituting.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Item 3)

No declarations of interest were received.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2024

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held 19th September 2024 were a correct record and that a paper copy be signed by the Chair.

4. Draft Budget

(item 5)

1. Mr Oakford introduced the budget report which included the following:
 - a) The budget report was created before the announcement of the government budget. It will be reviewed before January's Cabinet Committee.
 - b) The first quarter results showed an overspend of sixteen million pounds for Adult Social Care, which comes from savings they haven't been able to make and have therefore been bult into next year's budget. However, the rest of the council is well balanced.

- c) Until the government fully fund social care, next year KCC is very close to only being able to provide statutory services.
- d) In the past, budget from Highways has been insufficient due to it being redirected to Social Care. Support is being given to Cabinet Members and directors to try to stop this from continuing to happen.

2. Mr Baker added the following for transport:

- a) Subsidised busses have been included in the budget to make bus transportation a real option for residents and to help children get to school.
- b) Continued efforts will be made to secure external grants and to increase income where appropriate and ringfence it.

3. Mr Thomas added the following for the environment:

- a) There has been an increase in prices, contracts and demands in waste.
- b) There has been a removal of a previous savings target to review the number and operation of HWRC sites in the budget.
- c) The only local decision choice is that they are right-sizing the budget for the HWRC.

4. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- a) Mr. Thomas stated that the five hundred thousand allocated to the 25/26 budget was the right-size it and would be part of the baseline budget in future years.
- b) Mr. Baker agreed with a Member that they did not want to rely on BSIP, so implementing a safety net would help ensure bus services continued.
- c) Mr. Baker also explained that on-street parking was included in the budget because if the service was returned to KCC, 24 months' notice would be required. Discussions with district and borough councils would continue, but it was important to have the framework in place in the budget.
- d) Mr. Thomas added context from a waste perspective, stating that the net budget for waste was ninety-three million pounds.
- e) Mr. Oakford stated that no money was being saved from household waste sites in the budget and there were no plans to close any sites. The five hundred thousand was being put back into the base budget.
- f) Mr. Baker confirmed there would be no changes to subsidised bus routes. He acknowledged the challenges with the 50% bus cap, aiming to make bus travel a viable choice.
- g) Regarding on-street parking, Mr. Baker emphasised that financial and practical impacts needed consideration before any decisions could be made.

- h) Mr. Oakford noted that the long-term budget could not be guaranteed. KCC was planning for the future based on current knowledge through the MTFP. More information would be available after the spending review and grant distribution details were shared. However, bus subsidies would remain as budgeted through the MTFP period, and future budgets could not be decided by the current administration.

RESOLVED to note the budget report

5. Verbal Updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 6)

1. Mr Thomas provided an update on Waste and Recycling
2. Mr Baker provided an update on Highways and Transport
3. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - a) Mr. Baker agreed with a Member about the congestion on the Dartford Bridge. KCC was working with National Highways to ensure that if the Lower Thames Crossing was approved, work could start promptly. He stated that the moving traffic defences were operational despite delays, and a report would be presented to the committee in the new year.
 - b) Regarding electric charging points, Mr. Baker mentioned that as demand increased, more solutions would be provided, likely using a mix of government and commercial funding.
4. Mr Jones provided an update on Environment and Transport
 - a) Mr Jones agreed with a Member that it is important to improve recycling rates and manage waste in a more sustainable way. Controlling contaminated waste will have a major benefit and that will come through education.

6. Performance Dashboard

(Item 7)

1. Mr Thomas provided an update on the environment performance dashboard. Mr Wagner also added to the report.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - a) Mr Thomas suggested that the reason for the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) waste tonnage figure rising, may be the challenges that collection authorities have had. He also stated that if food waste could be separated from the rest of household waste, significant savings could be made.
 - b) Mr Jones added that it is the mix of waste that is received in the centres that makes the difference, particularly the inert building materials. Also, problems with new suppliers have caused an increase of people using HWRCs.

- c) In response to a question regarding how people are being incentivised to recycle, Mr Thomas explained that there has been a trial in Dover which has resulted in a 10% increase in the food collection rate. KCC are working to collaborate with other authorities and find the best system to improve overall practice. He also noted that simpler recycling is a new government requirement to which authorities will need to conform. Extended producer responsibility payments will be coming to both the disposer and collection authorities will bring more money into the system.

3. RESOLVED to note the Performance Dashboard

7. 24/00094 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Environment Plan

(Item 8)

- 1. Mr Thomas presented the report, Helen Shulver, Head of Environment was also present.
- 2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - a) Mr Thomas thanked Mr Hills, Mr Chittenden and Ms Dawkins for their support.
 - b) He urged the committee to include regular updates on the report in the work programme. The Kent Environment Strategy Cross Party Members Group was used to test ideas, and Members could bring questions there for more detail.
 - c) The strategy on Net Zero was scheduled for the January meeting.
 - d) Regarding match funding, Mr. Thomas stated it was a difficult time with limited capital programmes available. KCC was developing a Green Finance Strategy to support ongoing work, alongside funding through Council Tax and seeking sustainable, ethical investment.
 - e) Mr. Jones mentioned efforts to support green highways, including efficient supply chain management, influencing road users to make sustainable choices, and innovating new products and materials to reduce pollutants from highways.
 - f) Mr. Thomas agreed on the importance of partnership working, highlighting the framework for goals and strategies on page 24 of the plan. Helen Shulver added that more in-depth reports would be available to Members, and Officers were willing to share detailed information.
 - g) Mr. Thomas stated the aim was to have a cross-departmental support team rather than just a delivery team. He cited the example of carbon emissions from the KCC building, overseen by the director for infrastructure, with officers working alongside the director. More information would be in the report for the January meeting.

3. RESOLVED to adopt and delegate the report

8. 24/00095 - Adoption of the Kent County Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2025-2028

(Item 9)

1. Mr Thomas introduced the policy
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - a) Mr. Thomas assured Members that the map of how KCC was achieving Net Zero would be presented to the committee in January. However, the costs and impacts were not part of the Adaptation Plan.
 - b) Regarding the environment plan, Mr. Thomas stated that his team worked with partners to support it and was happy to provide regular updates to Members, especially concerning water management.
3. **RESOLVED to adopt and delegate the report**

9. Update on Kent's Plan Bee

(Item 10)

1. Mr Thomas presented the report
2. Further to questions and comments from members, it was noted that:
 - a) Helen Shulver commented that members could pledge their districts' participation in the scheme through the No Mow May website. The report included top performers, but figures from all participating districts could be shared with members
 - b) Mr. Thomas highlighted the Making Space for Nature strategy, which was being developed and would be presented to the committee in January. KCC was required to participate in this strategy along with 48 areas across the country, aiming to reverse decades of nature decline by prioritising species and habitats and mapping out the process.
 - c) In response to a discussion on signage for unmown areas, Mr. Thomas suggested that signs might be problematic for other departments but invited members to work towards having signage in their divisions.
 - d) Mr. Baker commented that the reporting system for informing Highways about verges needing to be left unmown, needed improvement. He added that the alternatives to current weed-killing chemicals were ineffective, leaving both those wanting weeds gone and those opposing chemical use unhappy. He suggested closer collaboration between Highways and the Environment Department to address this and other issues.
3. **RESOLVED to note the report**

10. Better Buses Bill - Bus Franchising

(Item 11)

1. Mr Baker introduced the report. Mr Lightowler presented the report virtually.
2. Members highlighted the following points:
 - a) Franchising the bus service would give the council more control over its operation.
 - b) Isolated rural communities and children using the home from school service need to be supported with more bus routes.
 - c) The biggest issue was encouraging people to use public transport.
 - d) There was nothing to lose by trying a bespoke bus model for Kent following consultations aligned with the local plan
 - e) A major obstacle was getting the routes right.
 - f) It was noted that taxpayers had to pay for buses that weren't being used.
 - g) It was important to make bus usage an attractive and practical option compared to cars. Currently, bus services were unreliable, expensive, and often did not connect train services to rural areas
 - h) A member expressed reservations about the council running buses, questioning the justification for taxpayers' money and noting that if corporate companies were struggling, the council would too.
 - i) Mr. Baker added that this had not become law yet, and details were still unclear. A major question was about funding. It was agreed that a broader vision was needed beyond just buses, emphasizing the importance of reliability and giving school children positive experiences on buses.
 - j) Mr. Baker mentioned that this issue tied into a wider devolution debate, questioning whether transport for Kent could work as a separate agency, similar to Kent Fire Authority, rather than being part of the council. With ringfenced funding, planning ahead would be easier, routes could be established, and infrastructure for buses would be in place. He agreed with a member's recommendation to explore this further. There was a disparity between public perception of KCC's responsibilities and those of bus companies. The benefits of franchising needed to be weighed, as it was a big project that could go wrong but would be excellent if successful.
 - k) Mr. Baker concluded by agreeing that conversations should continue, following the process through parliament, and seeing what funding KCC received at the end.
 - l) Mr. Lightowler added that franchising might offer opportunities to work with other authorities and give KCC better control, but funding remained an issue
 - m) A member suggested that the committee recommend further exploration of the franchise model to the cabinet and officers, which was agreed.

3. RESOLVED Members agreed to note the report once more information on bus franchising had been circulated.

11. Road Closures – Update report

(Item 12)

1. Mr. Baker introduced the report, highlighting that utility companies had overstepped their boundaries under the Roads and Street Works Act. They had significant power to access their equipment, and the regulators' broad definition of an emergency allowed them to justify emergency works easily. To regain control over the highways, Mr. Baker asked the Director of Highways to expedite publishing a legal framework for taking action against utility companies if evidence showed they were breaching regulations. If KCC found that utility companies were abusing the permit application process, they needed the ability to take legal action.
2. Pauline Harmer presented the update report to members.
3. Further to questions and comments from members, it was noted that:
 - a) No utility companies had been prosecuted in the last year.
 - b) Mr. Baker stated that KCC was restricted by law regarding road sign content. Recently, the utility company's name was moved higher up, but KCC's logo remained prominent. Pauline Harmer added that if KCC did the work, its name was in bold, whereas if a utility company did the work, its name was in bold and KCC's name was smaller underneath.
 - c) Mr. Jones commented on road sign clarity, directing members to the One Network website for information on permits and road closures. He noted the balance between informing road users and avoiding sign clutter
 - d) Regarding Kent Highways signage, Mr. Jones mentioned that their works were for longer periods, while KCC road works were shorter. Mr. Baker added that in an ideal world with unlimited funds, LCD screens could signal exact road closures and durations.
 - e) Mr. Jones highlighted the Kent Corridor Coordination Group's efforts to coordinate road works, though emergency works often disrupted plans and road users' journeys.
 - f) Mr. Robey concluded that KCC needed to find ways to fix roads more efficiently and quickly, noting that the extra cost of these road works might fall back on KCC.

12. Work Programme

(Item 13)

1. A member asked for the item Climate Change Adaption meeting to be changed to Environment and Climate Change Adaption meeting.

