

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 30 January 2025.

PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mrs S Chandler, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mr D Watkins and Mr R J Thomas

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Mrs S Hammond (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mrs C Head (Head of Finance Operations), Mr J Betts (Interim Corporate Director Finance), Mr N Abrahams (Area Education Officer – West Kent), Ms C McInnes (Director of Education) and McKay (Acting Chief Accountant)

IN ATTENDANCE VIRTUALLY: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr M Albiston (Director of Adult Social Care), Dr M Gogarty (Interim Strategic Lead for Public Health), Mrs L Gannon (Director of Technology)

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **84. Apologies**

*(Item 1)*

Apologies were received from Mrs C Bell.

#### **85. Declarations of Interest**

*(Item 2)*

No declarations of interest were received

#### **86. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th January 2025**

*(Item 3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 9 January 2025 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair

#### **87. Cabinet Member Updates**

*(Item 4)*

1. Mr R Gough, Leader of the Council provided an update on the following:
  - (a) At the [Scrutiny Committee](#) held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025, Members considered the call-in of [Decision - 24/00093 - Future of Commissioned Services at Seashells and Millmead Family Hubs](#). At that meeting,

Members agreed to refer the decision to full Council. Mr Watts (General Counsel) confirmed that in accordance with s.17.73 and S.74 of the Constitution, that following a decision to refer an item to full Council, it would first be reconsidered by the next meeting of the Cabinet (scheduled to be held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025). The decision had been made to not refer the item to the meeting of the Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> January as this would not allow sufficient time for an informed decision to be made. The Leader expressed his thanks to Mrs S Chandler (Cabinet member for Integrated Children's Services) and the officers involved, in recognition of the challenges presented by the Decision.

(b) The Leader confirmed that the gifts which were presented to him upon his visit to Ukraine in November 2024, had been received in the UK and had now been declared with the Monitoring Officer.

1. Mr Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, provided an update on the following:

(a) Before Christmas, the Kent Integrated Care Alliance (KICA) and Mr Watkins wrote to the Minister of State for Care, Stephen Kinnock, regarding concerns with the autumn budget. Whilst the Council appreciated the government's recognition of the challenges in social care, especially for care providers, concerns remained high regarding the upcoming changes to employer national insurance contributions and the rise in the national minimum wage in April. These changes could increase staff costs by about 10 to 11 percent, and could have a detrimental impact on care providers, leading to higher wages for some workers and potential staff shortages due to staff finding alternative better-paid roles. Further anticipated impacts included additional pressure on the NHS, with increased A&E visits and delayed hospital discharges; and potential closure of care providers, affecting vulnerable people and straining the local healthcare system. The ask of Government was to exempt the care sector from the national insurance increases, to which a response was yet to be received.

(b) The One You Kent service campaign continued to encourage people to set healthy lifestyle goals for 2025, through small, achievable goals to help build confidence and adopt healthier behaviours throughout the year. The One You Kent service supported people in getting more active, achieving a healthy weight, making better food choices, reducing alcohol consumption, and quitting smoking. This was set to be achieved through community initiatives such as walking groups and providing nutritious recipes. Mr Watkins asked members to promote the service through social media platforms and to encourage local residents to become Everyday Active Champions.

(c) New smoke-free spaces were due to launch across Kent, including parks, play areas, high streets, and outside schools to protect children from second-hand smoke and vaping. This initiative aimed to reduce cigarette litter and discourage smoking around children. Work was being undertaken by local councils to design signs and to warn the public about the dangers of second-hand smoke. A number of district-level local authorities had joined the scheme, and it was also due to be implemented in healthy living

centres in Dartford, Maidstone, and Gravesend. The project was funded by a £1.9 million grant from the previous government to reduce smoking rates.

2. Mrs Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, provided an update on the following:

(a) The Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) elections which were held at the end of 2024 saw a significant increase in youth engagement, with 22,866 young people voting, over 3,000 more than the previous year. This result exhibited a growing interest in local democracy among Kent's youth. In December 2024, over 100 young people, including new members and those concluding their term, attended a meeting to connect and share experiences. The KYCC met regularly, and the dates were available for anyone interested.

(b) The Department for Education had praised Kent's progressive approach to father-inclusive initiatives. In 2023, Kent in partnership with the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi Agency Partnership (KSCMP) created a parent inclusion coordinator role and developed a multi-agency father-inclusive practice guide through the collaboration of Kent Fathers, the charity Dads Unlimited, and Young Apprentices. The project included system modifications, new guidance, and training to enhance father-inclusive practices, resulting in increased engagement with fathers in specialist services. The Department of Health and Social Care, in recognition of Kent's successful rollout of the initiative, had recommended that all local authorities in England and Wales adopt Kent's model during the rollout of family hubs. The role included two years of funding for a father-inclusive champion. The recognition from government highlighted the team's dedication and the success of their efforts over the past three years.

(c) The Children's Well-Being and Schools Bill, which was currently at the committee stage, proposed several changes to children's social care. It included a requirement for local authorities to offer family group decision-making meetings before applying for care or supervision orders. Kent County Council had already included this as part of their practice, known as Family Group Conferencing. The bill also sought to amend the Children Act 2004 to mandate that local authorities, NHS integrated care boards, and police include education and childcare agencies in their safeguarding arrangements. The current practice was that safeguarding partners were only required to make arrangements to work with the relevant agency if they considered it appropriate to do so. Additionally, it proposed improvements to information sharing to benefit children. While the bill was not yet law, preparations were being made for its potential implementation.

3. Mr Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, provided an update on the following:

(a) In December Mr Love ran a competition for the best Christmas card design by a Kent Primary School pupil. The winning design was created by Sophie, a year five pupil from Minster and Sheppey Primary School, who was also the Arts Ambassador. The card was sent to education partners, key personnel, and government officials, including the Secretary of State

for Education and the Prime Minister. The card also featured designs of the two runners-up and listed all participating schools. There were 114 high-quality entries, and certificates were awarded to the winners. Mr Love also visited the school on December 18th, where Sophie shared her design process; and visited the school library, which had over 60,000 books and was highly valued by the students.

- (b) On 17<sup>th</sup> December, Mr Love visited Seabrook Church of England Primary School and met Mrs. Carter, the Executive Head Teacher, Mr. Carter, one of the heads of school, along with other staff and governors. Mr Love attended the spiritual gardens, which was contributed to through his member grant.
- (c) At the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024, [Decision - 24/00097 - Special School Review - Phase 1](#), which had been called in, was given approval to proceed to implementation. This decision was an important part of the Council's ongoing SEND reform.

4. Mr Baker, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, provided an update on the following:

(a) On the topic of buses, Mr Baker advised that the bus network (with the exception of subsidised contracted routes for school services) was operated on a fully commercial basis, which had been the case since deregulation in the 1980's, meaning that the Local Authority had very little control over the routes, timetables and services which the bus companies run. Should Kent County Council be accepted into the Devolution Priority Programme, it could help deliver future improvements in public transport.

(b) In regard to the extensive roadwork by utility companies, Mr Baker advised that whilst Kent County Council had a duty to keep roads flowing, utility companies had the right to access their assets for repairs, improvements, and maintenance, which often led to conflicts. This was a national issue, and the House of Commons Transport Select Committee was investigating it. The Council had submitted evidence and made several recommendations, as follows:

- Amending the definition of emergency street works to allow for better planning and coordination.
- A study on the economic and societal impact of street works by all parties, including local and national highways authorities, to determine if changes to working practices could reduce the impact on the public. KCC offered the A25 in Kent as a pilot area for this study.
- A proposal to widen the lane rental scheme to cover more areas based on local needs, as each region had different challenges
- The promotion of technology to reduce road closure times and improve communication, as well as recruiting and retaining trained operatives to minimise delays.

- The evolution of Kent's highways management and budgets with multi - year funding settlements which would improve the delivery of maintenance on the local highways network which would complement the strategic road network in the south east of England.

It was hoped that these measures would address the frustrations of residents and businesses and keep Kent and the country moving. Kent MP Katie Lam was on the inquiry panel, and Mr Baker looked forward to the committee's work and potential national solutions.

5. Mr R Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment, provided an update on the following:

- (a) Due to changes in managing soft furnishings with persistent organic pollutants (POPs), three HWRCs (Tovil, Dartford, and Sittingbourne) were currently unable to accept POPs. The situation at both Tovil and Sittingbourne was only temporary and once the necessary works had been completed the sites would be compliant and able to accept soft furnishings.
- (b) KCC has secured a new two-year textiles and shoe recycling contract with SAIT Recycling, a company based in Queenborough, Kent. SAIT Recycling ensured that 100% of textile waste was diverted from landfills and collaborated with many local charities, schools, and clubs across the south east.
- (c) The waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) zero-cost contract was due to be extended for 12 months from April 25 to ensure KCC had a collection service for WEEE from HWRCs across the county. REPC, a leading non-profit organisation, helped KCC comply with WEEE regulations by providing collection, treatment, and recycling solutions, ensuring environmental responsibilities were met via efficient means.
- (d) Work was ongoing at the HWRC reuse shops, a detailed update would be brought back to Cabinet in due course.
- (e) Recent adverse weather conditions had caused several issues. On 6<sup>th</sup> January, the River Medway flooded its banks, leading to the closure of the car park at Teston Bridge Country Park for one day. The floodwater backed up the pipes, causing the toilets to fail and necessitating repairs. As a result, the toilets were temporarily closed to the public. Additionally, the HWRC team was concerned about the extreme winds during the storm, leading to the closure of the Margate HWRC in the morning. The site was highly exposed, and there were significant health and safety concerns for both staff and customers. Furthermore, there was an issue at Horton Kirby that required attention. The team continued to work diligently on finding possible solutions and were collaborating with the local community to address the problem. Mr Thomas expressed his thanks to the teams dedicated and hard work in managing the weather-related impacts.
- (f) The public consultation on Kent's draft local nature recovery strategy, "Making Space for Nature," launched on 16<sup>th</sup> January and was due to run for eight weeks until 12<sup>th</sup> March. The strategy was expected to be

published later in the summer following consultation feedback. Additional information on consultation events could be found [Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway website](#).

6. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Growth and Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) Mr Murphy paid tribute to Lyndon Gurr, a talented former officer, who sadly passed away last month. Lyndon had worked for Kent County Council for many years, and KCC had benefited from his fantastic skills and insight, particularly in supporting the Council's broadband initiatives. Lyndon played an instrumental role in the Council's efforts to improve digital connectivity across Kent. Through his dedication and hard work, he helped connect over 150,000 homes with faster broadband in collaboration with Building Digital UK. His contributions made a significant difference in the lives of thousands of residents, enhancing their access to digital services and opportunities. The Council remained deeply grateful for Lyndon's work and the positive impact he had on the community. Mr Murphy, on behalf of the Council, expressed his condolences to Lyndon's family.
  - (b) The integrated strategy for work and health was open for consultation until mid-March. The economy team, public health, and the integrated care system sought input from local businesses, employers, residents, and other groups on addressing economic inactivity, filling local skills gaps, and supporting people into work.
  - (c) Work was ongoing with the implementation plan for the Kent and Medway economic framework. Recent efforts included the creation of innovation partnerships, campaigning for the reintroduction of international rail passenger services from Ashford and Ebbsfleet, and running workshops and training events to support local firms and enhance the Kent and Medway growth hub's core functions.
  - (d) KCC's No Use Empty (NUE) scheme continued to gain significant media and external interest. Steve Grimshaw, who managed the scheme, recently presented at Bedfordshire County Council's Empty Homes Forum, inspiring them to develop their own scheme. Additionally, the Labour MP for Liverpool Wavertree and other MPs highlighted NUE as a best practice example in a letter to the Housing Minister, showcasing the successful organisation of a National Loan Fund scheme for empty properties. This was a testament to the excellent work by Steve Grimshaw and the team.
  - (e) The Kent and Medway Business Fund continued to support local firms with loans for job creation and growth. Since July 2024, the Small Business Board had approved over £2 million in loans, averaging £400,000 per month, benefiting businesses across the SME sector and boosting business in Kent.
  - (f) The County Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan was submitted for independent examination in May 2024, with hearings in September 2024.

The Council was awaiting the Planning Inspector's Report, which was anticipated soon. Should the plan be deemed sound and legally compliant, KCC would be in a position to adopt it later this year. This would provide an up-to-date policy framework for planning applications, addressing the county's minerals and waste management needs while protecting the environment.

- (g) In December, Mr Murphy presented the Outstanding Achievements Award at the annual Best in Kent event, hosted by the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. The leader was also present. Mr Murphy was pleased to present the award to Mr. Mark Quinn for his contributions to charitable causes across the county.
- (h) On 15<sup>th</sup> January Mr Murphy attended the launch of the UK Soft Power Council at Lancaster House in London, with Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy. The Council aimed to strengthen foreign relationships through UK participation in culture, creativity, sports, education, science, and technology. This aligned with the work of the KCC-sponsored Straits Committee, whose reputation led to the invitation. KCC would support and advise the Foreign Secretary as needed.
- (i) On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, KCC hosted David Maenaut, the General Representative of Flanders in the UK. His visit followed a recent trip by Flanders officials and business representatives, including the Governor of West Flanders, to KCC. The meeting was productive and focussed on boosting trade, as well as enhancing cultural and research connections between Kent organisations and the Flanders region.
- (j) On 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December, Mr Murphy represented the Leader at the UK-France local government forum. The biennial conference focused on collaboration between British and French local governments to address future challenges such as cross-border cooperation. The 2024 forum, hosted by Leeds and Bradford, saw over 100 delegates from UK and French governments, local government associations, and major city officials. The British and French ambassadors were also in attendance.
- (k) Kent and the Department of Pas de Calais hosted a workshop on the Straits Committee, which was praised as an exemplary model of cross-border cooperation. The successful summit highlighted KCC's leadership in border relations, particularly with nearby regions and embassies. Notably, KCC and Pas de Calais were the only political bodies present from south of Bradford.
- (l) On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, Mr Murphy spoke at Get Link's celebration of 30 years of the Channel Tunnel at Folkestone, which carried 18 million passengers annually. The event highlighted the tunnel's economic benefits to Kent. Additionally, last week, Mr Murphy also participated in filming at Ashford International Station to promote the economic advantages of Eurostar resuming services from that station for Kent businesses and residents.

(m) In February, Mr Murphy was scheduled to meet with the German Deputy Ambassador in Canterbury to discuss trade and investment opportunities between Kent and German regions. In March, KCC was also scheduled to host its French, Belgian, and Dutch colleagues for the first Straits Committee meeting of 2025, marking the fifth anniversary of the ARIS agreement that established the Committee.

7. Mr Jeffrey, Cabinet Member for Communications and Democratic Services, provided an update on the following:

(a) In Mrs. Bell's absence, Mr Jeffrey highlighted the outstanding work of KCC's Trading Standards and Communications teams. They collaborated closely to dismantle a gang involved in vehicle clocking, and worked with national trading standards and victims to provide comprehensive coverage of the case. This effort received extensive regional and national media attention, including on GB News. The comms team reassured victims and prepared them for media interactions, resulting in excellent coverage. The case was one of the most complex to be handled by trading standards and involved a gang that removed over two million miles from vehicle odometers. The success of the case highlighted the vital and often unnoticed work that KCC's Trading Standards undertook.

(b) In regard to recent campaigns and news updates Mr Jeffrey advised of the following:

- The Pensioner 'Just Missing Out' scheme
- Adult Social Care Recruitment
- Kent Fostering.
- Mental Health Initiatives – Release the Pressure
- Public Health Activities - healthy weight activities
- Stop Smoking Campaigns
- Clean Air Night held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January – addressing the effects of log burning on respiratory health.
- Domestic Abuse Campaigns
- Greener Kent Initiatives - recycling campaigns
- Storm and Bad Weather Preparedness

These campaigns and initiatives reflected KCC's commitment to improving community well-being, environmental sustainability, and overall quality of life in Kent.

(c) In regard to consultations, Mr Jeffrey advised of the following:

- Changes to wellbeing services – 26 November to 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025
- Postural Stability – 6<sup>th</sup> November – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024
- Schools Funding Formula – 13<sup>th</sup> November to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024
- Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy – 16 January to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025
- Blue Bell Improvement Scheme – 21<sup>st</sup> January to 17<sup>th</sup> March 2025



- Family Hub awareness survey – closes 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025
- Otter Street EV charging

(d) Regarding support for Members, training and briefings had been prepared for Members on devolution and Local Government Reorganisation. Additionally, eight to nine sessions had been conducted on cyber security which aligned to staff training. Upcoming training included three sessions on inclusion, equality, and diversity. Members' response to the training had been positive.

(e) Mr Jeffrey noted that whilst a decision was awaited from Government on Kent's inclusion on the Devolution Priority Programme, and the potential postponement of elections, the response was required imminently to ensure adequate preparation. The organisation of an election required 400 to 700 staff per district or borough council and involved significant recruitment and training.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

**88. 24/00108 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report – November 2024-25**  
(Item 5)

*John Betts (interim Corporate Director Finance) and Joe McKay (Acting Chief Analyst) and Cath Head (Head of Finance) were in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital budget monitoring position as at November 2024-25 which highlighted a projected overspend of £23.3 million and represented 1.6% of the Council's total revenue budget. This was a reduction of £3.5 million compared to the end of Q2, however, it remained a significant concern for the Authority. It was essential to take action to reduce the forecast for 2024-25 and limit the need to draw from reserves. Key points included:
  - **Savings:** The forecast indicated that £80.3 million in savings would be delivered for 2024-25. This was a substantial amount, and thanks were paid to all officers and teams for their efforts. These savings were being closely monitored across different teams, with actions being taken to improve the robustness of savings proposals and their monitoring.
  - **Adult Social Care and Health** continued to have the largest overspend, projected at £35.4 million. Of this, £26.2 million related to savings that could not be delivered for 2024-25 but were expected to be achieved in future years. The remaining £9.2 million overspend was due to service-related pressures, driven by increases in the price and complexity of new social care placements. These financial challenges were similar to those faced by many upper-tier authorities, with 82% of local authorities with social care responsibilities experiencing similar issues.

- **The Growth Economic and Transport Directorate** was projected to overspend by £6.3 million. Unavoidable pressures included £3 million related to the national concessionary travel scheme. Extreme weather had also contributed to overspends in the Highways Department. These pressures would be addressed in the medium-term plan.
  - With regard to **Reserves** there was a need to draw down an additional £9 million from the corporate ICT reserve over the next two years to fund the update of the Oracle Cloud program. The system, which was over 20 years old, required more development than anticipated to meet business needs without adaptation. Investing in the system now was crucial to avoid future problems and higher costs.
  - The current estimated **capital program spend** for the year was forecast to be £315.5 million, representing 74% of the approved budget. The capital spend to date was £160.4 million. Directorates were projecting an underspend of £111.6 million against the budget, split between a £12.9 million real variance and £124 million of rephasing. Delaying prudential borrowing would help with short-term revenue savings, but rephasing could result in less funding due to inflationary pressures.
  - Any overspend was a concern for the Authority and remained a risk to the Council's future financial sustainability. Reserves were a one-off solution, and continued use without replenishment was unsustainable. The detailed financial challenges and the actions being taken to mitigate them were crucial for the Council's long-term stability.
2. Mr Watkins highlighted that the significant challenges within the Adults Directorate. However, the directorate remained on track to deliver £40 million in savings and income uplifts, which was a substantial achievement. A savings of £25 million was still required amongst an additional £10 million in demand, which was harder to manage. The focus was on addressing the £25 million shortfall. The team continued to work hard on various transformation projects, with some early successes in areas like reviews and technology and the directorate remained committed to improving the situation and keeping the overall budget on track.
  3. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:
    - A) Note the forecast revenue overspend of £23.3m (excluding Schools).
    - b) Note the forecast overspend on Schools' Delegated Budgets of £30.4m.
    - c) Note the forecast capital underspend of £111.6m.
    - d) Note the progress on the delivery of savings.
    - e) Agree the Capital budget changes.
    - f) Note the Reserves, Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators Monitoring

**89. Draft Revenue Budget 2025-26, MTFP 2025-28, Draft Capital Programme 2025-35 and Treasury Management Strategy**  
(Item 6)

*John Betts (interim Corporate Director Finance) and Dave Shipton (Head of Finance, Policy, Planning, Strategy) were in attendance for this item*

1. Mr Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services introduced the report and acknowledged the immense efforts from officers to produce the budget, particular in light of the challenges posed within the current financial year. Thanks were therefore expressed to finance colleagues, directorates, staff, and Cabinet Members for their contributions, emphasising that the budget was a collective effort.

The budget for the next financial year included a spending growth of £150 million, with £80 million allocated to Adult Social Care. Despite this, the council faced significant pressures, as over £60 million net in savings/income was still required for 2025-2026, on top of the £90 million saved for 2024-25. Mr Oakford noted that whilst the government's promise of additional funds was welcomed, the net growth in funding received from the government only amounted to £30 million, which was insufficient to cover the spending growth.

To address the shortfall, the council planned to raise council tax by 2.99% and an additional 2% for the social care premium, bringing in £47.3 million. However, this would still leave a substantial gap, which further highlighted the pressure on the council to make further savings. Whilst there was incremental spending in adults and children's services, other areas of the council had seen budget reductions to fund social care.

The government had announced a new recovery grant, however, the council received none of this funding, as it was allocated to areas with high levels of deprivation & lowest relative council tax base, which were not in the south of England. Mr Oakford noted that the growing costs of adult social care were not being adequately addressed by the government, leading to a situation where the council was close to only providing statutory services, with discretionary services disappearing.

Mr Oakford concluded by reiterating the systemic nature of the problem and the need for government intervention as the Council could not rely on reserves to fund the revenue budget; this was unsustainable and would lead to a financial crisis.

2. The Leader advised that the Council, along with other organisations, such as the County Council Network (CCN) would be making representations to government on the spending review regarding the allocation of funding.
3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
  - Members expressed their gratitude to Mr Oakford and his team for their diligent work, emphasising the significant effort required and thanked them

for their continued dedication. Further thanks were expressed to the Cabinet Members, along with the officers and staff throughout the whole of the Council for their continued hard work to deliver exceptional services under difficult circumstances.

- Without a resolution from Government on the funding issues in adult social care, new authorities with devolved powers would face significant challenges from the outset. Therefore, whilst Members were supportive of the devolution programme and the opportunities it presented, a government restructure would be futile whilst underlying challenges regarding adult social care remained.
- The Children, Young People and Education directorate had received additional government funding for prevention work in children's services. The additional funds allowed for the repurposing of previously allocated resources, ensuring that these crucial services could continue. This further related to the Children's Wellbeing Bill which would place additional duties on local authorities, and ensured funds were appropriately allocated.
- Concerns were expressed on the implications of local government reorganisation and funding realignment, particularly in relation to rural areas. Whilst there would be increased funding for urban and deprived communities, which was justified due to population density and the specific challenges these areas faced, rural communities also experienced significant levels of deprivation and should not be overlooked. There needed to be an equitable level of service provision across the country in recognition of the diverse needs.
- Members noted the challenges of managing limited funding from successive governments. Comparison was made between Kent's financial management and other councils, noting significant council tax increases were being requested elsewhere. Particular reference was made to:
  - Windsor and Maidenhead, 25%
  - Hampshire, 15 %
  - Bradford, 15%
  - Newham, 10%
  - Birmingham 10%
  - Cheshire East 10 %
  - Slough 8%

The Council continued to do an exceptional job in managing its finances prudently and effectively under very difficult circumstances and maintained the delivery of its services.

- Furthermore, comparison was made between Kent County Council and Birmingham City Council, which was 27% smaller in terms of population, however, Birmingham were set to receive £40million of the government's Recovery Grant, of which Kent were set to receive none. Additionally, Kent was due to receive a significantly lower allocation of the social care grant

within the proposed settlement. In monetary terms, Birmingham City Council were due to receive £64.00 per head compared to Kent's allocation of £16.00 per head.

4. RESOLVED that Cabinet considered the proposed amendments from Cabinet Committees and endorsed the draft budget to be presented to County Council on 13<sup>th</sup> February for final decisions.

**90. 24/00109 - Transfer the 18-25 section of the Strengthening Independence Service from the Children Young People and Education Directorate to the Adult Social Care and Health Directorate**

*(Item 7)*

*Sarah Hammond (Corporate Director for Children's Young People and Education) and Mark Albiston (Director of Adult Social Care) were in attendance for this item*

1. Mrs Chandler (Cabinet member for Integrated Children's Services) introduced the report on the transfer of statutory functions delivered by the 18-25 section of the Strengthening Independence Service (SIS) from the Children Young People and Education Directorate to the Adult Social Care and Health Directorate from 1 April 2025. The transfer of the service was to align with legal responsibilities, it did not impact on the level of service being provided by to those young people within that cohort. The council recognised the challenges inherent to the transition from young people's services to adult services and was working on a larger initiative to ensure the process was more coordinated and supportive. By addressing these needs earlier in the young people's lives, the council aimed to provide a smoother and more beneficial transition, ultimately improving outcomes for these vulnerable individuals and their families.
2. Mr Watkins (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care) re-emphasised the importance of the transition from children's to adults services and whilst children's services focused on protecting the child, adult services prioritised fostering independence. This strategic shift aimed to empower young people to live as independently as possible, giving them greater control over their lives.
3. Mrs Hammond (Corporate Director for Children's Young People and Education) elaborated on the responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services for a specific subset of young adults. Out of the total cohort of 920 individuals, 330 had an active Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP). These EHCPs would continue to be overseen and managed by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) service within the Education Division. This ensured that the educational and developmental needs of these young adults were met appropriately. Additionally, there was a smaller group within this cohort who were previously in the care of the local authority as children. These individuals would retain their care-leaver status, which entitled them to continued support, advice, and services from children's services. Therefore whilst these young adults were to funded by adult social care and

were legally the responsibility of the Director of Adult Social Care, the collaboration between children's and adult services was essential. This joint effort aimed to resolve historical challenges in service delivery, ensuring that the transition from children's to adult services was a seamless transition and that the young adults received comprehensive support.

4. Mr Albiston (Director of Adult Social Care) advised that the transfer was to support better alignment with the new regulatory framework, particularly with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as adult social care was to be included in their inspections. The recent assurance visit in Kent underscored the importance of this alignment. The transfer also acknowledged the fundamental change in the relationship between social care and parents once a young person become an adult, highlighting key legislative changes and assurance arrangements. The immediate focus was on minimising disruption for young adults, parents, carers, and staff, however, plans were in place for future strategic developments and the broader, long-term vision for transitions of young people. Communication with parents and young people would be enhanced to ensure they understood the implications of this decision.
5. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to transfer the statutory functions delivered by the 18-25 section of the Strengthening Independence Service, including the transfer of workforce in services, from the Children Young People and Education Directorate to the Adult Social Care and Health Directorate from 1 April 2025; and that delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education to take the relevant actions, including but not limited to, awarding, finalising the terms of and entering into the relevant contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary, to implement the decision

**91. 24/00115 - Kent County Council Integrated Care Strategy (KCC ICS) Delivery Plan**  
*(Item 8)*

*Anjan Ghosh (Director of Public Health) and Mike Gogarty (Interim Strategic Lead for Public Health) were in attendance for this item*

1. Dr Gosh (Director of Public Health) introduced the report and noted the extensive work undertaken on the Integrated Care Strategy, which began with the formation of the Integrated Care Board in July 2022. The strategy, also served as Kent's Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy, which was first produced in December 2022 and finalised in early 2024 after extensive engagement. The strategy involved a whole council approach, covering various areas such as early years, family hubs, adult social care, and workplace well-being. The strategy would act as the foundation for future work, especially in light of devolution and local government reorganisation.
2. Dr Gogarty (Interim Strategic Lead for Public Health) emphasised that addressing health issues required a collective effort beyond traditional health

services. The action plan, which included contributions from various directorates, aimed to improve health and well-being across Kent. Despite financial challenges, the council was committed to delivering these priorities, at low or no cost. Dr Gogarty highlighted the importance of the council's role as a system leader in health and well-being noted that the strategy was a comprehensive and corporately owned effort.

3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:

- Members commented on the approach to children's mental health and emphasised the need for a fundamental review of how those services were addressed. There were potential benefits of local government reorganisation and devolution, particularly in terms of strategic thinking and service integration, which could improve the delivery of outcomes for the likes of children's mental health services amongst others.
- Mr Watkins and the Leader were part of the membership for the Integrated Care System Leaders Group meeting. This group, which included leaders from Medway Council and senior members of the Integrated Care Board (ICB), focused on addressing any issues with the indicators in the plan and finding solutions to ensure progress.
- Low-level interventions at the neighbourhood community level, played an important part in helping to keep people out of hospitals and statutory adult social care, enabling them to live fulfilling lives at home.
- A proposal from the Government's Working Party suggested council leaders should annually report on the state of the county, not just the council. The broader approach aimed to evaluate the county's performance relative to other regions. Despite current challenges, it was essential that the Council addressed the poor performance. The Delivery Plan and associated work would help resolve the identified issues.
- The Integrated Care Strategy remained a partnership effort and involved statutory organisations, the voluntary sector, NHS trusts, and individual responsibility. Whilst the various organisations supported healthy behaviours, individuals were expected to also make their own healthy choices. There needed to be a shared responsibility and personal commitment to health.

4. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree to:

(a) Adopt the Integrated Care Strategy Delivery Plan on behalf of Kent County Council

(b) Delegate authority to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health and Leader of the Council to refresh and/or make non-substantial revisions to the Integrated Care Strategy Delivery Plan as appropriate during the lifetime of the document; and

- (c) Delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the relevant Corporate Directors of affected services, to take relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

**92. 24/00096 - Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2025-29**  
(Item 9)

Christine McInnes (Director of Education) and Nick Abrahams (Assistant Director Education, West Kent) were in attendance for this item

1. Mr Love (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) introduced the report which set out the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education 2025-2029. It was an annual rolling program which forecasted the number of school places needed across different phases and types of schools in Kent. The forecasts were based on collected data and meetings with local leaders and planners. Kent was noted for its accurate forecasting, with a 1.1% accuracy rate in 2023. A new factor in the latest plan was the monitoring of potential displacements of children from independent schools to the maintained sector due to the Government's decision to tax independent school fees. The plan was a live document. Mr Love expressed his thanks to the Assistant Director of Education, Mr Abrahams, and his officers.
2. Mr Abrahams (Assistant Director Education) elaborated further and advised that the document also touched upon other areas where the authority had statutory responsibilities, such as the post-16 sector and early years education, though these were not covered in as much detail. The overall trends in the plan reflected a continuation of patterns observed in recent years. Specifically, there was a declining number of children entering primary schools, which was linked to a decrease in birth rates in Kent since 2012. For context, the number of births in Kent peaked at just over 18,000 in 2012 and dropped to 15,000 by 2023. While birth rates significantly impacted the number of children requiring school places, other factors such as migration and house building also played a role. The decline in primary school enrolments was not uniform across the county; some areas had seen more significant drops than others. Projected forecast anticipated that there would not be a significant need for additional primary school places in the next five to ten years, depending on future birth rates. However, areas with substantial house building, particularly rural areas with limited existing school capacity, would potentially require additional places. In contrast, the secondary sector continued to experience pressures from larger cohorts moving through key stage 2; areas like Sittingbourne and Maidstone faced ongoing demand for year 7 places. Engagement with borough and district councils in developing the commissioning plan remained key. These discussions provide valuable local intelligence and helped align the plan with local strategic activities, such as local plans. Discussions regarding improved sharing and accessibility of the underlying data within the commissioning plan to better inform district and borough councils was ongoing.



3. Further to comments and questions from Members it was noted:
- Members commented on the impact of the retrospective VAT on education and the upcoming High Court case by the Independent Schools Council challenging this decision. Forecasts predicted a 3-7% reduction in independent school pupils, potentially exceeding half a million nationwide, with some independent schools potentially requiring closure.
  - Members remarked on the plan's flexibility, noting the need to adapt to unintended consequences, such as accommodating Ukrainian families. Furthermore, Members commented on the potential impact from geographical pressures caused via governments devolution agenda.
  - In response to concerns regarding the new requirement for 9 to 36-month provision starting in September 2025, and Kent's ability to deliver and monitor this, assurance was provided that the staggered widening of eligibility for free nursery places had been beneficial for the sector. The final phase of this expansion was set for September 2025. The early years sector had adapted to changing parental needs and government requirements, allowing time for model adjustments and data collection. Continuous monitoring was essential, and while there were initial concerns about potential deficits in places, the situation had improved. Early years colleagues engaged with providers to assess and adjust provision, ensuring sufficient places for different age groups. Currently, there were no critical concerns about meeting demand, however, this would continue to be monitored.
  - With regard to proposed housing plans without planning permission and therefore did not feature in a borough's adopted local plan, it was noted that the current forecasts for school places only included housing developments that had received planning permission. This approach was driven by the Department for Education (DFE), which set the technical rules for the forecasts. Discussions were underway with borough and district colleagues regarding potential development of a parallel forecast to provide a broader picture of the likely longer-term impacts of housing developments that had not yet received planning permission. These scenarios however would only provide an indicative insight and carry less certainty.
4. RESOLVED that Cabinet agree the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2025-29