

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 22 May 2025.

PRESENT: Mr J Baker, Mr B Barrett, Mr B Black, Mr O Bradshaw, Mr A Brady, Mr M Brice, Mr M Brown, Mr D Burns, Mr C Burwash, Mr A Cecil, Mr P Chamberlain, Mr W Chapman, Mr B Collins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr J Defriend, Mr S Dixon, Mr M Ellis, Ms S Emberson, Mr J Eustace, Mr L Evans, Mr P Evans, Mr J Finch, Mr R Ford, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mrs M Fothergill, Mr M Fraser Moat, Mr B Fryer, Mr M Harrison, Mr S Heaver, M J Henderson, Mr C Hespe, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr S Jeffery, Ms L Kemkaran, Ms I Kemp, Mr A Kennedy, Mr A Kibble, Mr P King, Mrs M Lawes, Rich Lehmann, Mr M Logen, Mr T Mallon, Mr R Mayall, Mr T Mole, Mr J Moreland, Miss D Morton, Mr M Mulvihill, Mr M Munday, Mr P Osborne, Mrs C Palmer, Mr R Palmer, Mr M Paul, Mrs B Porter, Mr T Prater, Ms A Randall, Mr H Rayner, Mr A Ricketts, Mrs S Roots, Ms C Russell, Mr G R Samme, Mr C Sefton, Mr T L Shonk, Mr D Sian, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Mr G Sturley, Mr D Taylor, Mr P Thomas, Mr A Thorp, Mr P Webb, Mr N Wibberley, Mr N Williams, Mrs P Williams and Mr D Wimble

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager) and Mr B Watts (General Counsel)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

309. Election of Chairman
(Item 1)

(Mr Sweetland, the present Chairman, presided for this item)

- (1) Mr Paul Webb proposed, and Ms Isabella Kemp seconded that Mr Richard Palmer be elected as Chairman of the County Council.
- (2) As there were no further nominations, Mr Sweetland declared Mr Richard Palmer as Chairman of the County Council.
- (3) Mr Palmer made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office, following which Mr Sweetland invested Mr Palmer with the Badge of Office.
- (4) Mr Palmer paid tribute to Mr Sweetland and presented him with the Past Chairman's Badge, following which Mr Palmer took the chair.
- (5) RESOLVED that Mr Palmer be elected as Chairman of the County Council.

310. Election of Vice-Chairman

(Item 2)

- (1) Mr Paul Chamberlain proposed, and Mrs Pamela Williams seconded that Mr Peter Evans be elected as Vice-Chairman of the County Council.
- (2) As there were no further nominations, the Chairman declared Mr Peter Evans as Vice-Chairman of the County Council.
- (3) Mr Evans made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office, following which Mr Ridgers invested Mr Evans with the Vice-Chairman's Badge. Mr Evans returned thanks for his election.
- (4) Mr Sweetland presented Mr Ridgers with his past Vice-Chairman's badge.
- (5) The Chairman thanked Mr Sweetland and Mr Ridgers, on behalf of the Council, for their years of service.
- (6) RESOLVED that Mr Evans be elected as Vice-Chairman of the County Council.

311. Apologies for Absence

(Item 3)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Miss Connie Nolan, Mr Dean Truder, and Mr Ryan Waters.

312. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda

(Item 4)

- (1) The General Counsel advised Members that unless an interest was significant and related directly to an item on the agenda all interests recorded in their Register of Interests may be taken as read.
- (2) There were no declarations of interest.

313. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2025 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record

(Item 5)

- (1) The Democratic Services Manager explained there was a clerical error at paragraph 5 of Item 15 - *Governance Updates* - of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2025.

- (2) In relation to Item 9 – *Review of Decision 24/00093 – Commissioned Family Hubs* - Mr Lehmann explained that Mr Mike Baldock wished for his name to be recorded in the minutes as voting against the motion.
- (3) RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 March 2025 be approved as a correct record subject to the amendments referred to in paragraph 1 and 2 above.

314. The Returning Officer to submit the returns of persons elected to be County Councillors until 2029
(Item 6)

- (1) The County Returning Officer for the County of Kent submitted the return of persons elected to be county councillors for the electoral divisions of the county as reproduced in the papers for this meeting.
- (2) The County Returning Officer, Mr Hook and the Chairman thanked staff who had helped organise and run the 2025 elections.
- (3) RESOLVED that the return of Councillors duly elected to the County Council for the period until May 2029 be noted.

315. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 7)

Chairman's Charities

- (1) The Chairman said he looked forward to supporting two local Kent based charities during his year as Chairman which were SATEDA, a specialist domestic abuse charity exclusively for women and children in Kent, and the Young Lives Foundation, a children's charity dedicated to offering guidance, support, and opportunities to individuals facing significant challenges.

Mr Roy Bullock MBE

- (2) The Chairman explained that at the March meeting of the County Council, Members agreed a formal motion of condolence for Mr Roy Bullock MBE, tributes for whom would be taken at today's meeting.
- (3) During his time at KCC, Mr Bullock served on the Corporate Policy Overview Committee, Electoral Boundary & Review Committee, Environment Highways & Waste Policy Overview Committee, Regeneration & Economic Development Policy Overview Committee, Education & Libraries Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Policy & Resources Committee (Vice Chairman), Property Sub-Committee and the Tunbridge Wells Local Board. He was appointed an Honorary Alderman in 2016 for his service to the Council.

- (4) Mr Bullock also served as Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council from 2007 to 2012.
- (5) Tributes were made by Ms Kemkaran, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Rayner and Mr Brady.

316. Election of the Leader of the Council
(Item 8)

- (1) Mr Maxwell Harrison proposed, and Ms Georgia Foster seconded that Ms Linden Kemkaran be appointed as Leader of the Council.
- (2) As there were no further nominations the Chairman declared Ms Kemkaran as Leader of the County Council.
- (3) Ms Kemkaran returned thanks for her appointment.
- (4) RESOLVED that Ms Kemkaran be appointed as Leader of the Council.

317. Appointment of the Leader of the Opposition
(Item 9)

- (1) The Chairman proposed and the Vice-Chairman seconded that the Council confirms the opposition Member nominated by the Opposition Groups, Mr Antony Hook, as Leader of the Opposition.

Carried without a formal vote

- (2) RESOLVED that the Council confirms that Mr Hook be appointed by the Opposition Groups as Leader of the Opposition.

318. County Council Questions
(Item 10)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 14 questions were submitted by the deadline and 14 questions were put to the Executive. 11 questions were asked and replies given. A record of all questions and answers is available [online](#) with the papers for this meeting.

319. Report by Leader of the Council
(Item 11)

- (1) The Leader of the Council opened her report by saying it was an honour and a privilege to have been elected as a Member of the Council and thanked her fellow Reform UK Members for putting their trust in her as Leader. She paid tribute to her predecessor, Mr Roger Gough, who had been Leader of the Council for six years and thanked him for his years of service. Ms Kemkaran said she would work positively with staff, Members, MPs and District Leaders to serve the people of Kent. She encouraged

Members to ignore distractions and put the people of Kent at the heart of everything the Council did.

- (2) The Leader spoke about Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and expressed concern that LGR would remove the county's unique identity and sense of being as one county. Reform UK was proud to directly represent the people of Kent and she would make it her priority over the coming months to find out as much as she could to formulate a response.
- (3) Referring to potholes the Leader said one of the Administration's first tasks was to work closely with the Highways Department to find new solutions that would deliver better and faster outcomes. Every possible income stream would be explored to bring about a real improvement for the whole of Kent.
- (4) In relation to adult social care, the impacts of an aging population would be examined in detail. The Leader commented that successive governments had failed to establish an overarching plan and a joined up approach between agencies would be sought.
- (5) Ms Kemkaran highlighted that improving education and skills for young people was crucial to the future of the nation. A greater emphasis would be put on apprenticeships and training so that Kent could lead the way in equipping young people in practical trades and reduce the need for labour from abroad.
- (6) The Leader would be supporting the initiative of the Police and Crime Commissioner to ban smartphones from schools and emphasised the need to understand why SEN diagnoses were rising each year. She commented that every child in Kent deserved a quality education.
- (7) There would be consideration of the tangible benefits of net-zero initiatives and whether they provided value for money for residents, and attempts by central government to build on agricultural land and overdevelop towns and villages would be resisted. The Leader said her group believed that new housing should primarily be built for local people and preserving communities was vital for a sense of belonging. Reform UK supported farmers and fruit growers and there would be a renewed focus on coastal regeneration. Kent's fishing industry would also be supported.
- (8) The Leader explained that a Cabinet Member for Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE) had been appointed to identify potential savings and efficiencies throughout the Council. She said the Reform UK Members had agreed to support a motion to cut 5% from all Member allowances and redirect a saving of over £100,000 into Member Community Grant Funding.
- (9) Finally, the Leader spoke about the results of the recent election and the courage of Members. She commented that the people of Kent had voted overwhelmingly for change and for a different approach to how the Council was run.

- (10) Mr Hook, Leader of the Opposition welcomed all the new Members and paid tribute to the previous Leader and Administration of the Council. He commented that his group had doubled in size as a result of the elections and its members were serious about their role as a member of the opposition and as local champions for the areas they represented. In particular he paid tribute to Mrs Dean who had been a KCC Member for 40 years.
- (11) Mr Hook summarised the beliefs of his group which included; a society that was fair, free, and open; opportunities for all; for people to be free from poverty, ignorance, or conformity; protection of the environment; the welfare of all residents; cost of living, safety, and personal civil liberties; equality of opportunity and the adaption of services to meet differences; factual accuracy; empathy as a strength; and the opposition of populism, chauvinism, nationalism, and oligarchy. He said those broad principles would guide the Liberal Democrat group as it led the scrutiny of the Council. He invited the Administration to be cautious about leaning on its claims to have a mandate and commented that policy should be made by the Council and not from instructions from a national party.
- (12) Mr Hook referred to adult social care and stressed that the recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection which had rated the Council's services as requiring improvement must be a high priority for the Council. He asked for assurance from the Leader that a detailed plan to fix the issues would be presented at the next Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee.
- (13) In relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Mr Hook explained that his group opposed a Mayor for Kent and supported power at more local levels. He said the public should be the key voice in deciding what the shape of a new arrangement should be.
- (14) Regarding SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Mr Hook said his group welcomed a better understanding of the increasing numbers of diagnoses and commented that children in Kent with SEND had been badly let down. In February, the Kent SEND Trust had threatened a judicial review against the Council over the redesignation of seven special schools to which the previous Administration capitulated. Mr Hook invited the Leader to confirm that that was a permanent position.
- (15) Mr Hook spoke about net zero and said his group regarded the transition to renewable energy as extremely important, and if plans were brought forward to do less environmental work, they would be scrutinised carefully.
- (16) Finally, Mr Hook said his group supported farmers and fruit growers and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) had expressed dismay at the grave impact Brexit had had on farmers financially and in exporting produce. He urged Cabinet to consider the impact that climate change was having on the ability of farmers to produce crops like soft fruit in Kent.
- (17) Mr Lehman, Leader of the Green Group also congratulated Members on the recent election and echoed the Leader's praise for the former Leader of the

Council, Mr Gough. He paid tribute to Mr Gough's level-headed approach in Council meetings and said this had led to a constructive environment and he hoped that would continue.

- (18) Mr Lehmann spoke about LGR and said his group had varying views but all were against change that would further erode democratic accountability. He commented that the Green Party policy was for decisions to be made at the lowest practical level to ensure, as far as possible, that decisions were made by communities. He noted that the majority of decisions in Kent were currently made across thirteen councils and felt it would be impossible to reduce that number to just three or four without seeing bad decisions being made. He recognised that combining the County Council with District Councils would help reduce confusion over the services each council provided.
- (19) Mr Lehmann spoke about net zero and shared some facts relating to, for example, the pricing of oil and gas in the UK, the increase in domestic fuel bill costs over the past 10 to 15 years, gas price surges in 2022 and 2023, and UK investment to bring more renewables online. He said the move by Reform UK to shift from climate change denial to anti-net zero was in line with far right political groups across Europe and he hoped that the Executive would engage with the facts and resist any pressure from their central party.
- (20) Finally, Mr Lehmann said he was broadly supportive of apprenticeships and a smartphone ban.
- (21) Mr Rayner, Leader of the Conservative Group congratulated the Chairman and the Leader on their election and said his group looked forward to working with the new Administration to deliver best value for money to Kent residents, whilst considering and scrutinising carefully any proposals put forward.
- (22) The Conservative Group supported the formation of a LGR cabinet committee to allow Members to consider in public the costs and consequences, and to enable Kent residents to hear Members debate proposals.
- (23) Turning to adult social care, Mr Rayner referred to budget overruns. Whilst adult services were mandatory, he stressed the importance of ensuring that all possible efforts were made to avoid cost overruns and said he looked forward to anything that his group could offer by way of help and assistance.
- (24) Mr Brady, Leader of the Labour Group welcomed old and new Members and expressed his disappointment at the Administration's decision to take down the Ukrainian flag from within the Council Chamber.
- (25) Mr Brady asked the Administration what they would do differently to the previous Administration and said he had hoped to hear about local policy in the Leader's report. He challenged the Reform UK Members to prove to Kent residents that they were different from the previous Conservative Administration. He referred to the Reform UK group's assertion to open the books which he said had always been open and public and referred to the

work of the Council's internal and external auditors. He spoke about the role of opposition members to robustly challenge and question decision-making.

- (26) Mr Brady asked what the Administration would do differently in managing the declining road network and the adult social care overspend whilst providing Kent residents with the best possible service.
- (27) Mr Brady welcomed a focus on education and skills including apprenticeships, and regeneration in partnership with district councils. He expressed his hope that the Executive would make decisions on a county level and would bring forward new policies and decisions.
- (28) Ms Kemkaran responded to points made by the Group Leaders. She assured Members that Cabinet Members, who were soon to be announced, had already started work investigating areas within their portfolios and were eager to bring forward new policies and plans.
- (29) Ms Kemkaran responded to Mr Brady's point regarding the Ukrainian flag being removed from the Council Chamber and said whilst she believed that the flag of Kent should be in its place she was still able to support the people of Ukraine. The Leader spoke about Reform UK's election campaign and the group's policy to represent all the people of Kent.
- (30) The Leader was positive about the Group Leaders' hopes that Members could work together on areas such as SEND and supported Mr Rayner's view of forming a cabinet committee to consider LGR.
- (31) Ms Kemkaran spoke about the seriousness of the small boats crossing the English Channel into Kent and said this was a key concern expressed by many residents when Reform UK Members were campaigning for the recent election.
- (32) The Leader was pleased that Members intended to work together to support the county's farmers and fruit growers, and on adult social care. She explained that having such an ageing population was a difficult and concerning problem which local councils had been left to resolve with insufficient funding.
- (33) The Leader concluded by saying that all streams of income would be looked at cooperatively and creatively and Reform UK would serve all the people of Kent regardless of who they voted for. The people of Kent deserved to be at the centre of everything the Council did and that would be Reform UK's way forward.
- (34) RESOLVED that the Leader's report be noted.

320. Proportionality and Appointment to Committees and other bodies
(Item 12)

- (1) Ms Kemkaran proposed, and Mr Collins seconded the motion that

“Council is asked to:

- (a) Determine the total number of Committee places; the allocation of those places between the political groups; and the allocation of places on certain bodies;
 - (b) Note that the Selection and Member Services Committee will make or confirm necessary appointments to outside bodies, except for those which fall to be made by the Leader of the Council; and
 - (c) Agree to give delegated authority to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Group leaders and the Monitoring Officer, to adjust the allocation of committee places as necessary in order to conform to overall proportionality requirements; and to confirm external Joint Committee appointments where required prior to the Summer Recess.
- (2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1.
- (3) RESOLVED that Council:
- (a) Determines the total number of Committee places; the allocation of those places between the political groups; and the allocation of places on certain bodies;
 - (b) Notes that the Selection and Member Services Committee will make or confirm necessary appointments to outside bodies, except for those which fall to be made by the Leader of the Council; and
 - (c) Agrees to give delegated authority to the Democratic Services Manager, in consultation with the Group leaders and the Monitoring Officer, to adjust the allocation of committee places as necessary in order to conform to overall proportionality requirements; and to confirm external Joint Committee appointments where required prior to the Summer Recess.