KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 1 October 2026.

PRESENT: Ms L Kemkaran, Mr B Collins, Mr P Osborne, Mr C Hespe, Mr P Webb, Mrs B Fordham, Mrs G Foster, Mr J Henderson, Mr R Palmer and Mr D Wimble

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr A Ghosh (Director of Public Health), Mrs A Beer (Chief Executive), Ms H Woodland (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health), Ms C McInnes (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education), Mr B Arnold (Corporate Director Finance), Mrs C Head (Head of Finance Operations), Mr A Loosemore (Head of Highway Asset Management), Mr J McKay (Chief Accountant) and Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

149. Apologies
(Item 1)

No apologies were received.

150. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the agenda
(Item 2)

No declarations of interest were received

151. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 July 2026
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2026 were approved as a correct record.

152. Cabinet Member Updates
(Item 4)

1. Mrs Georgia Foster, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, provided an update on the following:

(a) Mrs Foster reported on a visit to Hedgerow Short Break Centre in Staplehurst, which provided short-break residential care for adults with learning disabilities and enabled parents and carers to take a break from their caring responsibilities. She referred to the recent refurbishment and the positive response of service users to the improved facilities.

(b) She also reported on a visit to MediQuip, the community equipment service provider commissioned jointly by KCC and the Kent and Medway NHS Integrated Care System. She highlighted the role of community equipment in

supporting independence and enabling residents to remain at home, together with MediQuip's work to clean, refurbish and reuse returned equipment.

(c) Mrs Foster promoted the Kent Connect to Support website and the Know How to Start campaign, which provided information and advice to help residents remain independent and connected, including those recovering from illness or requiring support in their caring responsibilities. She encouraged Members to promote the resource within their communities.

(d) She updated Members on the national Big Conversation on Care, launched by Baroness Casey to give people in England an opportunity to express their views on the future of adult social care and how changes could affect current and future generations. She advised that further opportunities to contribute would be available when the platform reopened later in the autumn.

(e) Mrs Foster confirmed that procurement for the recommissioning of older persons' residential and nursing services had been completed and that the programme had entered mobilisation. She advised that, subject to completion of the required mobilisation milestones, the new contractual arrangements were expected to become operational by January.

(f) The Leader welcomed the support available to carers, the recycling and reuse of community equipment and the opportunity to contribute to the review of adult social care.

2. Mr Jamie Henderson, Cabinet Member for Environment, Coastal Regeneration and Public Health provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Henderson reported that food waste recycling across Kent had increased by 27.6% since April compared with the same period in the previous year. More than 2,100 additional tonnes had been collected, resulting in savings of over £290,000 in disposal costs.

(b) He advised that two Kent projects had been shortlisted for Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) awards, which recognised work to reduce waste and support recycling. The Low Carbon Kent e-Waste Warriors project had been shortlisted in the Circular Economy Achievement category and KCC's partnership with FCC Environmental on car seat recycling had been shortlisted in the Best Partnership category.

(c) Mr Henderson reported that the reuse shop at New Romney Household Waste Recycling Centre had reopened following a redesign, enabling more items to be reused rather than discarded. Its formal launch was planned for 16 October. He also referred to reuse events held at Margate and Ashford and to the £50,000 Kent Community Waste Prevention Fund, which would support local groups, charities and social enterprises to deliver projects centred on reuse, repair and waste prevention.

(d) On waste crime, he advised that partners were developing a shared action plan following Kent's first county-wide fly-tipping conference. The plan would strengthen collaboration between local authorities, enforcement agencies,

landowners and the waste sector, improve intelligence sharing and support a more coordinated response to fly-tipping across the county.

(e) Mr Henderson reported that the Health and Nature Fund had awarded funding to 23 projects. These would enable residents to take part in nature-based activities intended to support mental health, reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing. He also outlined accessibility improvements at Shorne Woods Country Park, Trosley Country Park, Lullingstone Country Park and Brockhill Country Park, which were intended to make the sites easier for more residents to use.

(f) He advised that funding had been secured through Natural England's Species Recovery Programme to support recovery of the threatened Dusky-Lemon Sallow moth. The work would inform future elm planting and habitat management, with a further application made to support additional planting across Kent and Medway.

(g) Mr Henderson reported that the inaugural Kent Water Resilience Partnership would meet on 8 October to review evidence, consider adaptation requirements and help shape a long-term investment strategy for water resilience.

(h) Mr Henderson concluded his environment update by reporting on completion of the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme. The £42 million scheme, supported by £2.5 million from KCC, had increased water storage capacity and would help protect homes and businesses from flooding.

(i) Turning to public health, Mr Henderson highlighted World Suicide Prevention Day and the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy, which included actions to help people find support and have confident conversations about difficult emotions. He encouraged residents experiencing difficulty to seek support through the Release the Pressure helpline or one of the eight safe havens in Kent.

(j) He reported on Know Your Numbers Week, which had promoted blood pressure checks at home, at participating pharmacies and through NHS health checks. He emphasised that high or low blood pressure could be present without known symptoms.

(k) Mr Henderson referred to Sexual Health Awareness Week and encouraged the promotion of KCC's free and confidential sexual health services.

(l) He highlighted Stoptober, the annual campaign encouraging smokers to make a quit attempt, and referred to the health, wellbeing and financial benefits of stopping smoking. He advised that support was available through One You Kent and Allen Carr's Easy way programme.

(m) On winter preparedness, Mr Henderson encouraged eligible residents to obtain a flu vaccination and advised that appointments could be booked through the NHS app or by calling 119.

(n) He also encouraged parents and carers to check that children had received both doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination. He reported that 82.9% of five-year-olds in Kent had received both doses by the end of March, below the 95% level recommended by the World Health Organisation to prevent outbreaks.

2.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) In response to a question about the timing of the action plan arising from the fly-tipping conference, Mr Henderson advised that he did not have a publication date but would obtain this from officers.

(b) The Leader welcomed the progress on recycling and reuse, looked forward to the inaugural Kent Water Resilience Partnership meeting and welcomed the focus on suicide prevention and the signposting of routes through which residents could access health checks and other support.

3. Mr Richard Palmer, Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Palmer reported that the number of stiles on public rights of way had reduced by 50%, improving access to the countryside for people with disabilities and families with pushchairs. He recognised the support provided by Kent landowners.

(b) He updated Members on Trading Standards enforcement activity. This included a joint operation with Kent Police in Canterbury, during which more than 10,000 counterfeit and unsafe products were seized. Officers had also visited businesses on the Isle of Sheppey, where unsafe toys, counterfeit goods and illegal vapes were seized and advice was provided to traders.

(c) Mr Palmer reported on work to protect residents and businesses from fraud and scams. This included a court order secured through Operation Adopt requiring £30,000 to be paid to a fraud victim, action that had prevented £127,000 in losses and scams training provided to 169 KCC staff. He also referred to engagement with the Office for Product Safety and Standards concerning the facilities and sustainable funding required to maintain effective controls at the ports.

(d) He highlighted the work of Community Wardens, including support for vulnerable residents, action to address antisocial behaviour and activity to reduce loneliness. He also referred to the water safety programme delivered by Community Wardens, which helped young people to learn lifesaving skills and understand the risks associated with open water.

(e) Turning to libraries, Mr Palmer reported that more than 16,000 children had participated in the Read to the Beat summer reading scheme and referred to high levels of satisfaction with the library service. He also noted increased visits and book issues at the new Folkestone Library and Community Learning Centre.

(f) On support for older residents, he advised that £140,000 had been invested through Forever Active Kent to help people remain active and independent. Mr Palmer also reported that the Live Longer Better network had marked its fifth anniversary and had grown to more than 200 members.

(g) Mr Palmer referred to the proposed Hillsborough Law and advised that a further update would be required on its potential implications for the Coroner Service.

(h) Tribute was paid to community warden Giles Barnard, who had passed away in July.

3.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) Further to comments on the Community Wardens' water safety programme, Mr Palmer confirmed that the scheme had helped young people to learn lifesaving skills and water safety and had been delivered in areas where this was possible.

(b) Members joined the tribute to Giles Barnard and recognised his service to the community. The Leader thanked Community Wardens and Trading Standards for their work and noted the important link between the two services in identifying and responding to scams.

4. Mr David Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Wimble reported that 76% of learners participating in Wave 6 of the Skills Bootcamps had achieved a positive outcome, which exceeded the national average. He advised that Wave 7 had made a positive start and that a further £670,000 had been secured from the Department for Work and Pensions. This would provide 200 additional construction training places.

(b) Mr Wimble updated Members on the Local Skills Improvement Plan for Kent and Medway. The plan had been shaped by feedback from employers and focused on priority sectors where skills needs had been identified, including agri-food, social care and the visitor economy.

(c) He also reported that KCC and Medway Council were leading a taskforce focused on young people who were not in education, employment or training. The taskforce aimed to improve the employment and training opportunities available to this group.

(d) Turning to business and regeneration, Mr Wimble reported on continued investment through the No Use Empty programme. Short-term development finance had been provided for commercial schemes in Manston, New Romney and Dover, which would support the delivery of 79 new business units.

(e) He reported that the total value of loans made to local businesses through the relaunched Kent and Medway Business Fund had exceeded £5 million.

(f) Mr Wimble advised that Sarah Roots had been appointed as the non-executive chair of Growing Kent, which brought together Visit Kent and Invest Kent.

(g) He also reported on the launch of the Kentish Wine Way campaign. The campaign promoted Kent's vineyards alongside accommodation, hospitality, food, heritage and other visitor attractions, linking the county's wine offer with the wider visitor economy.

(h) Mr Wimble outlined progress on the development of a ten-year local growth plan for Kent and Medway. This would set out the long-term approach to supporting business growth, creating jobs and attracting future investment. It would also complement the existing economic framework and the forthcoming spatial development strategy.

(i) On international rail services, Mr Wimble encouraged residents and businesses to complete the demand survey supporting the campaign to restore services to Kent. He explained that the responses would provide evidence of demand and strengthen the case presented to prospective operators, Government and the wider rail industry.

(j) Mr Wimble also reported on international collaboration through the Straits Committee. This had included a visit to Folkestone by a delegation from Zeeland in the Netherlands to consider coastal regeneration and approaches to place marketing.

(k) Finally, Mr Wimble referred to local plan consultations and KCC's support for the proposed use of section 106 agreements, rather than the Community Infrastructure Levy, for relevant developments. He advised that this approach could secure greater contributions towards the infrastructure required to support development.

4.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) In response to a question about public support for restoring international rail services, Mr Wimble emphasised that residents and businesses should complete the demand survey. He said that the responses would provide evidence of demand for services at Ebbsfleet and Ashford and support the case being made to prospective operators and Government.

(b) In response to queries raised regarding the timetable for spatial planning, Mr Wimble advised that work was continuing and that further meetings were due to take place.

(c) The Leader welcomed the Kentish Wine Way campaign, the appointment of Sarah Roots and the work to support employment opportunities for young people. She also referred to ongoing lobbying for the restoration of international rail services to Kent.

5. Mrs Beverley Fordham, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills provided an update on the following:

(a) Mrs Fordham reported on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection. She considered that the findings had recognised significant improvement since 2022 while identifying further work that was required, and advised that the service would build on the progress already made.

(b) She reported that the VITA tool had been implemented to support the timeliness, consistency and quality assurance of Education, Health and Care Plans. She reflected on the governance process through which the proposal had progressed and said that the experience provided an opportunity to consider a more streamlined approach to approving new technology and digital systems, while retaining appropriate scrutiny, assurance and risk management.

(c) Mrs Fordham advised that KCC had submitted its draft SEND Reform Plan in June in response to the Government's SEND reform proposals, but had not yet received the Government response expected in September. She emphasised that the Council could not stand still while awaiting national developments and that its own processes and partnerships needed to support sustainable improvement.

(d) Mrs Fordham reported on visits to specialist resource provisions at Richmond School and Leysdown Primary School. She had seen how inclusive provision supported children to remain connected to their local schools and communities. She also reported on a visit to Curly's Farm.

(e) Mrs Fordham also referred to a visit to the Olive Academy pupil referral unit in Tunbridge Wells and highlighted the importance of closer relationships between pupil referral units, alternative provision settings and mainstream schools.

(f) The Leader recognised the significant improvements noted by Ofsted and supported a more streamlined approach to approving new technology and digital systems while retaining robust governance.

6. Mr Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Children's Services provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Webb reported that he had completed his programme of visits to KCC's reception centres, including Connor House and Aspen Lodge.

(b) He referred to the Virtual School Kent Post-16 Awards Celebration, which had recognised the achievements, resilience and success of Kent's children in care and care leavers aged 16 and over.

(c) Mr Webb reported on the opening of Sittingbourne Library and Family Hub and the reopening of Queenborough Library and Family Hub following refurbishment. He highlighted the benefits of bringing library and family support services together in accessible community settings, as this enabled families using hub services to make wider use of the library facilities.

(d) He reported on attendance at a Kent Association of Foster Carers summer event. He had also attended a Young Carers summer activities event, which had enabled children and young people to spend time with their peers and take part in recreational activities.

(e) Mr Webb also reported on a visit to KCC's second new children's home in Ashford, which would provide a safe and supportive home for children in care within Kent.

(f) He concluded with an update on the Family Hub communication boards, with 13 boards installed across five districts. The boards used pictures, symbols and words to help children express their thoughts, feelings, interests and needs and to communicate, play and engage with others.

6.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) In response to a question about the effect of combining library and family hub services, Mr Webb advised that footfall had increased by 22% at Sittingbourne and by approximately 16% at Queenborough following reopening. He also highlighted that families accessing the family hub services were making wider use of the library facilities.

(b) The Leader welcomed the integration of libraries and family hub services, recognised the importance of support for young carers and thanked Cabinet Members for their visibility across Kent.

7. Mr Peter Osborne, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Osborne reported that public transport teams had supported more than 10,000 pupils to access home-to-school transport at the start of the academic year. He also advised that more than 20,000 young people continued to benefit from the Kent Travel Saver scheme, which enabled young people to travel by bus across the county.

(b) He advised that promotional bus fares and free travel initiatives had been delivered during the summer, including arrangements supporting travel to major events. He said that this activity had been intended to encourage greater use of public transport and added that further opportunities to encourage residents to use sustainable forms of transport were being developed.

(c) Mr Osborne reported on the traffic management arrangements put in place for the summer getaway. Partnership working through the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum had supported contingency planning for possible disruption, including the preparation of sites at Lydden Hill and Folkestone Racecourse. He advised that the predicted disruption had not materialised, neither contingency site had been required and Operation Brock had therefore been stood down earlier than anticipated.

(d) Turning to highway maintenance, Mr Osborne advised that the Highways Maintenance Transparency Report had been published, providing information on the condition of the highway network and the maintenance activity undertaken. He also reported that work was under way to prepare a refreshed Highways Asset Management Plan before the end of the financial year, which would set out the Council's approach to managing its highway assets.

(e) Mr Osborne reported that preparations for the winter service were well advanced. The service was due to operate from 2 November to 18 April and would support the Council's response to winter weather conditions across the highway network. He also referred to the competition inviting children to suggest names for the new gritters.

(f) He updated Members on work to identify options for reopening Galley Hill Road following the cliff collapse. This included planning and design work for a potential solution, consideration of traffic mitigation measures, a funding bid to the Department for Transport and legal work concerning compensation arising from the closure.

(g) Mr Osborne reported on the implementation of the Ringway highways maintenance contract and the transition to the new contractual arrangements. He confirmed that the high-speed road maintenance programme had been completed and also referred to continued investment in local schemes through the local highway maintenance programme, which was addressing priorities across the county.

(h) He advised that Stuart Fowler, Road Safety Intelligence and Innovations Team Leader, had been shortlisted for a National Highways Champion Award in recognition of his work.

7.1 Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

(a) Members welcomed improvements in road conditions in Ashford and Thanet. Mr Osborne advised that the service was continuing to address the highway maintenance backlog and that the impact of the work undertaken was becoming increasingly visible.

(b) In response to a question regarding Operation Brock, Mr Osborne advised that the arrangements remained necessary to manage disruption pending a permanent solution. He referred to £20 million secured for work with the Port of Dover to increase queuing capacity at the port, which was intended to accommodate more traffic within the port and reduce the need to use Operation Brock.

(c) The Leader welcomed the improved management of summer traffic, confirmed that Galley Hill remained a priority and wished Stuart Fowler well in the National Highways Champion Award.

8. Mr Chris Hespe, Cabinet Member for Local Government Efficiency and Local Government Reorganisation provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Hespe reported that KCC and Medway Council had held a briefing on Local Government Reorganisation and devolution for Kent MPs on 25 September. He advised that KCC continued to seek clarity from Government following the pause in the process for reorganising local government structures in Kent and Medway, which had created uncertainty about the timetable and next steps.

(b) He referred to comments made by the Minister at the County Councils Network AGM on 23 September. The Minister had stated that there was no timetable for the review and that Government remained committed to Local Government Reorganisation. The Minister had also indicated that locally developed solutions were preferred, although Government would make decisions where necessary.

(c) Mr Hespe also referred to the treatment of legacy debt under any future arrangements. He reported that the Minister had indicated that Government would not assume local authority legacy debts, although bespoke arrangements could be negotiated as part of future proposals.

(d) Turning to devolution, Mr Hespe advised that Government had welcomed correspondence from the leaders and chief executives of Kent and Medway local authorities seeking progress. He said that any proposal for a mayoral strategic authority would need to demonstrate a clear net benefit to Kent and its residents before it could be supported.

(e) Mr Hespe reported that the work completed through the service complexity assessments would remain relevant when considering future strategic arrangements, despite the pause in Local Government Reorganisation. He added that further Government direction was expected through a planned white paper and future financial guidance.

(f) Turning to efficiencies, Mr Hespe advised that Star Chambers had considered both planning for 2027-28 and the delivery of savings in 2026-27. He also referred to ongoing reviews of expenditure and service delivery, including work led by KCC Audit to provide assurance that the Council received the services for which it paid.

(g) The Leader thanked officers for the work undertaken in preparation for Local Government Reorganisation and commented on the uncertainty arising from the Government's pause.

9. Mr Brian Collins, Deputy Leader provided an update on the following:

(a) Mr Collins thanked officers for their continued support and advice.

(b) He provided an update on infrastructure works at Sessions House, including the installation of new security barriers, improvements to reception and a further security door planned near the social services reception. He said that the works were intended to improve security for Members, officers and staff.

(c) Mr Collins advised that the infrastructure team was assessing the wider KCC property portfolio. As part of this work, consideration was being given to the possible future use of vacant space at Sessions House, particularly in Block B.

He noted, however, that decisions about future use were affected by uncertainty regarding future local government arrangements.

(d) He reported that expenditure on advertising, mainly social media advertising, had reduced from £630,000 in 2024-25 to just over £300,000 following a review of what expenditure was essential.

The Leader thanked the Cabinet members for their updates.

153. 26/00055 - Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - Q1 2026-27 *(Item 5)*

Cath Head (Head of Finance Operations) and Joe McKay (Chief Accountant) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Collins introduced the Quarter 1 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report for 2026-27, which set out the Council's financial position at the end of Quarter 1. The forecast revenue outturn variance was an overspend of £21.4 million, representing 1.3% of the overall budget. He said that any forecast overspend was a concern and presented a risk to the Council's future financial sustainability.

2. As a result, the Corporate Management Team was strengthening its oversight of spending. The measures included asking managers to review non-essential expenditure carefully; reviewing recruitment across permanent, fixed-term and agency roles; restricting the use of consultants; reducing travel wherever possible; and reviewing contracts, leases and future commitments. Managers within directorates would have an important role, with divisional management teams maintaining a focus on compliance with the measures. Mr Collins said that he looked forward to improvements in the period ahead.

3. The most significant forecast overspend was £13 million within Children, Young People and Education. This comprised £19.8 million relating to placements for looked-after children, partly offset by forecast underspends of £4.1 million in disability placements for looked-after children and £2.8 million in home-to-school and college transport.

4. There was also a forecast overspend of £9.1 million within Adult Social Care and Health. This reflected a combination of savings that were no longer expected to be delivered in-year and other service pressures.

5. Mr Collins reported that savings totalling £91.7 million were being monitored during 2026-27. Of this amount, £82.5 million was forecast to be delivered, representing 90% of the target.

6. The schools' delegated budget position largely reflected demand for special educational needs support and was funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant. The position did not yet reflect the effect of the new High Needs Sustainability Grant, which, subject to approval by the Department for Education, was expected to be received in the autumn.

7. In accordance with the statutory override implemented by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, in-year Dedicated Schools Grant deficits were held in a separate unusable reserve until March 2028. The 2026 Local Government Provisional Settlement had set out the intention that councils should not expect to fund Dedicated Schools Grant deficits in 2028-29, subject to implementing reasonable recovery plans.

8. The forecast capital outturn was an underspend of £32 million against budget. This comprised a £3.1 million real variance and a £35.2 million rephasing variance. Mr Collins advised that it was usual for capital programmes to include a significant amount of rephasing.

9. Mr Collins concluded by noting that the report reflected the position at the end of Quarter 1 and that the Council was approaching the end of Month 6. Early indications up to Month 5 suggested that the forecast overspend had reduced. Although the figures had not yet been confirmed, he was optimistic that the overspend would be lower by the end of Quarter 2.

10. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agreed to:

    a) NOTE the revenue and capital forecast outturn position for 2026-27 detailed in the report, and accompanying appendices
    b) AGREE the revenue cash limit adjustments in 2026-27 to update the base budget position (per Section 3) ; and
    c) AGREE the subsequent revenue and capital cash limit adjustments (per Appendix 2 and 3)

154. Quarterly Performance Report, Q1 2026-2027
(Item 6)

Matthew Wagner (Chief Analyst) was in attendance for this item

1. Mr Wagner, Chief Analyst, introduced the Quarter 1 Performance Report covering April to June 2026. He advised that 42 key performance indicators were reported, of which 19 were rated green, 13 amber and 10 red. Six indicators showed a positive trend, 31 were stable or showed no clear trend and three showed a negative trend, with two new indicators not yet having sufficient historic data for trend analysis. He outlined the indicators rated red across customer services, governance and law, environment and transport, education and skills, adult social care and public health, together with the relevant context. He also highlighted positive performance, including procurement savings and value added to contracts, developer contributions, street lighting performance, youth justice, school exclusions, repeat referrals to children's social care, adult social care admissions and health visiting reviews.

2. Further to questions and comments from Members the discussion included the following:

    (a) Mr Wagner advised that the greenhouse gas emissions indicator used a standard measure of equivalent carbon dioxide tonnes and agreed to liaise with the relevant service and report further information to a future Cabinet meeting.

(b) Mrs Foster (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care) clarified that the adult social care indicator relating to KCC-supported people in residential or nursing care where the CQC rating was good or outstanding related to seven homes out of more than 500 used by KCC.

(c) Mr Wagner also agreed that further information would be provided on work to encourage digital take-up across customer service transaction types.

3. It was RESOLVED that Cabinet agreed to note the Quarter 1 Performance Report and the actions being taken to address areas where performance was not as targeted.