

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Online on Tuesday, 2 March 2021.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Chairman), Mr N J Collor (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr A Booth, Mr A H T Bowles, Mr D L Brazier, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr A Cook, Mr D Farrell, Mr S Holden, Mr A J Hook, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr G Lymer, Mr J P McInroy, Mr S C Manion, Mr D D Monk and Mr A M Ridgers

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

274. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Mr Wright.

275. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

276. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021

(Item 4)

Resolved that the minutes were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

It was noted as matters arising that Martyn Riley (Programme Manager, Kent and Medway Business Fund) had provided the following responses to questions raised at the meeting of 18 January 2021 regarding female entrepreneurs and regarding businesses in Gravesham:

- 1) The number of directors/CEOs who are women - In terms of businesses in receipt of loans from the Kent and Medway Business Fund - 58% have female directors (40 of 69). 29% have female CEOs/or equivalent (20 of 69). In the case of recent approvals where funding is committed but are yet not under contract - 60% have female directors (18 of 30). 26% have female CEOs (8 of 30). In terms businesses in receipt of equity investments (Kent Life Science Fund). 37.5% have female directors. 0% have female CEOs.
- 2) In terms of Gravesham companies who have submitted pre-applications, full applications, approved for funding for the Kent and Medway Business Fund: a) How many pre-apps from Gravesham businesses – 19; b) How many full applications from Gravesham businesses – 4 ; c) How many Gravesham businesses funded - 2.

277. Verbal updates by Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 5)

1) Mr McInroy, Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development gave Members an update on behalf of Mr Whiting, Cabinet Member for Economic Development:

The news was welcomed about a £20 million fund to support businesses trading with the EU which had been announced by the government. The SME Brexit Support Fund would help small and medium sized businesses adjust to new Customs and VAT rules when trading with the EU. Kent businesses were encouraged to take advantage of the scheme and make an application. SME which only traded with the EU and therefore, new to importing and exporting, would be able to apply for grants up to £2000 for each trader to pay for practical support including training and professional advice to ensure that they could continue to trade effectively with the EU.

Businesses were encouraged to visit the 'Kent International Businesses' website for access to a range of export support and organisations, including the Department for International Trade for practical advice on changes to be made to ensure ongoing export readiness and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce for export and customs documentation.

Mr Whiting had attended 3 meeting or events regarding housing and housing provision in the south east, including developing homes in rural areas. At each, he had commended the work of KCC's Select Committee on affordable housing and promoted the establishment of a housing growth unit, as suggested by the Select Committee.

2) Mr Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services updated Members:

The Open Golf Tournament which had been postponed in 2020 and had been rescheduled for 15 July 2021. Planning was underway for a 'full scale' championship but robust plans were in place for a reduced capacity event or 'behind closed doors' model, if required.

There would be a phased return for Libraries, Registration and Archives which had been affected by the pandemic. Face to face birth registration appointments were to resume in March, as well as ceremonies and essential computer use in libraries. In April, libraries were to open with normal opening hours for browsing and use of study space. Initially, 35 libraries were to re-open but work was being done so that 43 would be open by the end of April, whilst social distancing measures continued. The archive search room was also due to re-open in April for bookable appointments.

In June, all restrictions were due to be ended and work would be ongoing over the summer towards full service restoration. Mr Hill advised that he would issue a note to all Members.

Members thanked Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director (Growth, Environment and Transport) for her years of service to KCC and local government and wished her all the best for her retirement.

278. Marsh Million - Closure of Scheme

(Item 6)

1) David Smith (Director of Economic Development) introduced the report on the closure of the Marsh Million scheme. It had been agreed with funding partners and concluded that the scheme should be discontinued and remaining monies returned on a pro rata basis.

2) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:

- Mr Smith was confident that repayments would be made by the grant recipients according to the formula outlined in the report, as the allocations had been made after due diligence in respect of the solvency and good management.

3) Members agreed to note the recommendations regarding closure of the scheme.

279. Kent & Medway Business Support

(Item 7)

1) David Smith (Director of Economic Development) introduced the report regarding the interventions made by KCC to support businesses during the pandemic. Within two days of the announcement of lockdown, work was done with the Chamber of Commerce to initiate a helpline for over 16,000 businesses to assist them to access grants and funding from central government. Positive feedback had been received from businesses about the support received from KCC.

2) Mr Smith reported that a repayment holiday of 12 months had been arranged for recipients of Kent and Medway Business Loans and this was extended to 18 months to alleviate the cashflow difficulties during the pandemic. In late 2020, £3million of new loans were made to businesses eligible for the Kent and Medway Business Loans which would help to create jobs.

3) Members agreed to note the report.

280. 21/00010 - Digital Autopsy

(Item 8)

1) Mike Overbeke (Head of Public Protection) introduced the report regarding the provision of the autopsy service using a CT scanner. The use of digital body image scanning would decrease the use of invasive post-mortems and make the process quicker and more efficient and reduce reliance on NHS PM provision, delivering significant savings. The approach is supported by the Senior Coroner and the wider Service.

2) Mr Hill said that the digital autopsies would create revenue savings and operational resilience moving forward.

3) Members agreed to endorse the recommendations outlined in the report.

281. Sport and Physical Activity Service Delivery Model

(Item 9)

- 1) Tom Marchant (Interim Head of Countryside and Community Development) introduced the report. Covid-19 had affected KCC's services, as well as the sport and physical activity sector. However, the benefits of exercise on physical and mental health had been widely recognised during the pandemic and KCC had positively responded with the examples set out in the report.
- 2) Mr Marchant said a review of the service had been conducted and it was proposed to implement a new service delivery model, based on three key strategic drivers including the 10-year strategy recently published by Sport England.
- 3) In response to questions from Members it was noted:
 - The Kent Sport website (www.kentsport.org) provided support to sector as well as comprehensive information about programmes being delivered across the county. A second website, Everyday Active Kent (<https://www.everydayactivekent.org.uk/>) had been launched aimed at less active residents in Kent. Social media was also being used to promote services, partners and projects.
 - Virtual sessions were being offered to younger and older age groups so that people could do physical activities at home indoors, in their gardens or in parks when restrictions allowed. For those who were not online, hard copies of information with exercises were provided.
 - The funding for the Tackling Inequalities Programme from Sport England was £220,000 and the remaining funding had come from a variety of sources via Everyday Active small grants.
- 4) Members agreed to note the report.

282. Country Parks Strategy

(Item 10)

- 1) Mr Hill introduced the report regarding the proposal to extend the current Country Parks Strategy and reported that the Strategy had been successful in achieving higher visitor numbers and increasing income generation.
- 2) Helen Shulver (Interim Head of Country Parks and Countryside Management Partnerships) outlined the report. There had been an unprecedented increase in numbers of visitors to the country parks during the pandemic and therefore, the focus has been on keeping the parks safe, available and open to the public. An extension to the Strategy would allow for public consultation and more detailed work to undertaken to produce the 2022-2027 Kent Country Parks Strategy.
- 3) In response to questions from Members, it was noted:

- Preston Hill, Dry Hill and Park Wood have returned to the management of KCC's Country Parks within the last year, as previously they had been managed by KCC Properties and Estates Team. It would be considered the sites could be best used to serve the community alongside the rest of the country parks portfolio.

4) Members agreed to endorse the recommendations outlined in the report.

283. Performance Dashboard

(Item 11)

Members agreed to note the report.

284. Work Programme

(Item 12)

Resolved that the work programme be noted.

285. Proposed Meeting Dates for 2021-2022

(Item 13)

Members agreed to note the proposed meeting dates for 2021-22.