

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 Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 18 January 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A Sandhu, MBE (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mr C Broadley, Mr T Cannon, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr S C Manion, Mr J Meade, Mr A M Ridgers, Mr M J Sole, Mr R J Thomas, Mr T L Shonk and Dr L Sullivan

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P J Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr T Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place), Mr M Rolfe (Interim Head of Community Protection) and Mr J Pearson (Head of Libraries Registration and Archives)

IN ATTENDANCE VIRTUALLY: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport) and Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

173. Apologies and Substitutes (Item 2)

Apologies had been received from Mr Lewis and Dr Sullivan was present as substitute.

Mrs Binks and Ms Grehan were present virtually.

It was noted that since the agenda was published Mr Shonk had joined the committee.

174. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda (Item 3)

Mr Manion declared an interest in relation to Item 9 - 23/00122 – *Kent Community Warden Service Review* - that his neighbour was a Community Warden and he would not participate in the discussion.

175. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 (Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 were a correct record.

176. Revised Draft Revenue Budget 2024-25 and 2024-27 MTFP, Draft Capital Programme 2024-34 and Treasury Management Strategy
(Item 5)

Mr Dave Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Peter Oakford introduced the report and provided a high-level update on the draft budget since it was first published in November 2023. Mr Oakford said the balanced draft budget included one off savings, the use of reserves, increased dividends from the Council's trading companies, and an assumed 5% Council Tax increase. He said each 1% increase in Council Tax was worth approximately £9million. Mr Oakford highlighted that 70% of the budget was covered by local Council Tax and 30% came from other areas such as government grants.
2. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, and Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on their individual portfolios.
3. A Member suggested that the community warden service be financed from the community navigators budget line within adult social care. Mr Oakford said adult social care was the Council's highest spending area with proposed savings for the year 2024/2025 of around £50million, and demand growth and price increases at the end of 2023 were still being seen.
4. A Member asked whether the Council would be able to maintain statutory and non-statutory Public Rights of Way (PROW) requirements under next year's budget. Mrs Bell said contract related inflation had been built into the budget and a small amount was allocated for adopting additional routes. Mr Tom Marchant said no revenue savings had been taken out of the PROW budget for next year, and growth pressures were being funded in the Medium Term Financial Plan.
5. A Member asked how future savings would be achieved in Trading Standards and whether this would affect the workforce. Mr Mark Rolfe said, nationally, it was very difficult to recruit Trading Standards Officers and there was a temporary hold on recruitment for qualified Trading Standards Officers within the Council. However, there were trainees within the Council who were due to qualify in 2025.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the updated revenue budget and MTFP, draft capital strategy and programme, and draft Treasury Management Strategy; and
- b) Propose to the Executive, any changes which should be made to the relevant sections of the budget related to the Committee's portfolio area before the draft is finalised by Cabinet on 25th January 2024 and presented to Full County Council on 19th February 2024 for decision.

Mr Sole, Dr Sullivan and Mr Baldock asked for their votes against the recommendation to be noted in the minutes.

177. LINK Group - Presentation

(Item 6)

Mr Adrian Roberts, Chief Commercial Officer, Link Group was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Adrian Roberts, Chief Commercial Officer at Link Group, introduced himself to the committee and provided some background and history in relation to the work of Link Group. Mr Roberts gave an overview of the markets in relation to cash and banking and said that since the covid-19 pandemic cash usage across the country had fallen. The use of ATMs was 30% lower today than before the pandemic and cash accounted for around 15% of all payments. However, cash was still very important with £1.6billion being withdrawn from Link ATMs every week. There were currently 5000 bank branches across the UK, approximately a quarter of the number there was 35 years ago. Mr Roberts explained that closures of bank branches were continuing at around 600-800 per year and, looking forward, banks would likely be centred in large towns and cities with the creation of a national shared infrastructure such as banking hubs. Mr Roberts explained Link was the co-ordinating body within the industry for bank closures and objectively assessed the impact of closures on communities with a view to recommending a new shared service such as a banking hub. Mr Roberts said Link could also accept requests from the public to carry out an access to cash assessment within a community. Mr Roberts provided an overview of the banking hubs that currently existed across the country and where they were located.
2. Mr Hood proposed, and Mr Baldock seconded that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development that the Council responds to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) consultation requesting that it is made a statutory requirement to deliver banking hubs where business banking has ceased in the community.
3. The Chair put the motion set out in paragraph 2 above and the motion failed.

Mr Hood, Dr Sullivan, and Mr Baldock asked for their votes for the motion be noted in the minutes.

4. A Member commented on the importance of cash and asked whether locations other than post offices could be used as banking hubs and Mr Roberts confirmed this was possible.
5. A Member asked about rural communities having access to cash free of charge and Mr Roberts said there were approximately 38,000 free to use ATMS across the county and invited anyone to inform Link if there were specific locations where cash could not be accessed free of charge.
6. Mr Roberts agreed to circulate information after the meeting regarding community requests.

RESOLVED to note the presentation.

178. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director

(Item 7)

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Regarding registration services there was an increased demand for death registration appointments and appointment availability was being kept under review.
 - (b) Mrs Bell had undertaken visits to libraries including the Digital Heritage and Access Centre in Folkestone, Quarry Wood where the behind the scenes work that supported the library service took place, and the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone. Whilst temporary provision was in place for Folkestone Library, focus remained on looking at options for the long term and engagement with stakeholders including Folkestone & Hythe District Council. Options would be looked at carefully from a financial and property perspective.
 - (c) The temporary library in the Dover Gateway was now open whilst major works took place at the Dover Discovery Centre.
 - (d) The winter mini reading challenge ran until 19 February 2024. Libraries were promoting the challenge and encouraging children to read over the winter break.
 - (e) The coroners' courts had moved from Sessions House to Oakwood House in December 2023 and the new facilities had been well received.
 - (f) Mrs Bell attended the Yasmin Vardimon Dance Company's 25th anniversary gala in December at their premises in Ashford. This was a project which KCC had given significant support.
 - (g) In December, the Council hosted the John Downtown awards for young artists from local schools and Mrs Bell said the quality of work entered was outstanding.
 - (h) The Kent Film Office was established some years ago as an economic development initiative by the Council. Production companies could apply for filming permits and receive help sourcing and managing filming locations. The filming activity generated on average more than £5million direct spend into the Kent and Medway economy every year.
2. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Manston Business Park, and East Kent Opportunities Scheme, was now entering its final year and a new development would be announced shortly on remaining sites and would be accompanied by a large tree planting programme. The Manston Business Park provided the Council and Thanet District Council approximately £300,000 income per annum.

- (b) The Council was working with a developer in Thanet regarding a waste hydrogen site in the Thanet area.
 - (c) Mr Thomas, Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development, was the Chair of a regular meeting with Folkestone & Hythe District Council concerning the future of Dungeness Power Station. It was hoped this would be a possible site for future nuclear production of small to medium reactors and assurance had been received from government that all existing sites would be utilised.
 - (d) On 11 March 2024 there was a district visit to Maidstone Borough Council and Mr Murphy hoped these visits would continue.
3. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, had provided a written update on operational matters to Members prior to the meeting which included the following:
- (a) The Kent and Medway Business fund had relaunched in November 2023 and over 100 applications had been received.
 - (b) Work on a transition plan following the closure of the Southeast Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) was taking place to ensure that the voice of business continued to influence the strategic economic growth agenda. The Kent & Medway Economic Partnership would oversee the implementation of the new Kent & Medway Economic Framework.
 - (c) The SELEP Accountability board last week approved two new Kent projects which would receive a share of a final tranche of Getting Building Fund.
 - (d) Pfizer announced in November that it would be making up to 500 redundancies at its Sandwich site as part of a review of its global operations and KCC had been working closely with a number of local partners and government departments to consider actions that would reduce the impact for the local workforce and the Discovery Park site.
 - (e) Kent Scientific Services saw a record-breaking number of samples being tested in the last three months of 2023. Cigarettes are required, when not being actively smoked, to go out and the KSS team had developed a new test to help enforcement authorities to establish whether cigarettes met this requirement.
 - (f) Trading Standards and Kent Scientific Services continued to carry out work in relation to illegal vapes and Trading Standards had secured a grant from National Trading Standards to support this work over the next 15 months. In December, Trading Standards, along with brand representatives and Kent Police, seized a substantial quantity of counterfeit products and tobacco from retailers in North Kent.
 - (g) Active Kent and Medway was running “Jump into January” challenge, to encourage the tracking and logging of activity throughout the month by those that engaged with Everyday Active and beyond. The Council’s Active Kent

and Medway grants programme – which provided up to £1000 of support to organisations and clubs delivering sport and physical activity to encourage more people, more active, more often, would also run this year. Information on the criteria and application process can be found on the Active Kent and Medway website. www.activekent.org.

4. A Member asked whether progress was being made regarding Broadband in hard-to-reach areas. Mr Murphy said BDUK were in the process of finalising contracts with providers and further information would become available in due course.
5. A Member asked about the increase in registration appointments over the winter period in relation to resource and Mr Pearson confirmed that appointments had been maximised under existing staffing and costing arrangements. Birth and death registrations were prioritised, and this was kept under review on a weekly basis so that areas with the most demand were targeted.
6. Asked about the re-opening of the Grace Hill library in Folkestone, Mrs Bell said the cost of work needed to re-open Grace Hill Library was currently beyond the Council's financial capability. Mrs Bell said the temporary facilities would remain open for as long as was required and until a long-term solution was in place, and the Council was working hard with partners to explore potential opportunities.

RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

179. Performance Dashboard

(Item 8)

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

1. Mr Wagner introduced the performance report for Quarter 2 of 2023/24 and said of the 22 Key Performance Indicators (KPI), 15 were rag rated green, 6 were amber and 1 was red. Mr Wagner provided a summary of the KPIs that were rag rated amber and red.
2. Members raised concern about the red KPI – *EPE16: Median number of days to resolve priority faults on public rights of way network* – and the ongoing issues which resulted in complaints from residents.
3. A Member asked about the amber KPI – *CST02: percentage of lessons Domestic Homicide Review attendees rating the event as very good or excellent* – and Mr Wagner explained the KPI included those who rated the event 'very good' or 'excellent', if 'good' was also included the overall percentage would increase to 96%.
4. Asked for more details regarding KPI - *KSS01: Number of work experience hours of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) delivered by Kent Scientific Services (KSS) for Kent students in the 16-24 age range* - Mr Rolfe said a mixture of work experience was offered including week long placements for sixth form students studying science, nine week placements for

students studying T levels at college, and a university undergraduate student in the laboratory for all of August. In total the work experience included around 15 students from different backgrounds.

5. Members commented that more detail in relation to the background of KPIs would be helpful for future reports. Mr Wagner said target setting and review for next year's KPI's was currently being processed and this would be reported back to the cabinet committee.

RESOLVED to note the performance report for Quarter 2 of 2023/24.

180. 23/00122 - Kent Community Warden Service Review

(Item 9)

Mr Shafick Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Ms Kat Dardry (Community Safety Practice Development Officer) and Mr Mark Rolfe (Interim Head of Community Protection) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell explained that the review was a budgetary measure and not a reflection on the performance of the community wardens. She highlighted that at this year's National Safeguarding Adults Board Excellence Awards ceremony in November the Maidstone and Tonbridge & Malling team won both the empowerment team award and the protection team award for their work with adults at risk within communities and thanked all the community wardens across the county for their work. Mrs Bell explained that resources would be targeted to areas of highest need and the model was designed to be flexible if opportunities to add to the service became available in the future.
2. Mr Peerbux introduced the report and provided a summary of the consultation responses. He explained that Appendix 2 of the report listed alternative funding options that had been explored. Unfortunately, there were not any viable alternatives that could offset the savings required to continue the current operating model.
3. A member asked whether support was being given to staff currently in post and Mr Peerbux said face to face meetings had taken place with staff from the outset, and throughout, to engage and consult with them on the process.
4. A Member asked about the cost of the external market research and Mr Peerbux said internal options were considered and the resources were not available within the timeframe. The total cost was approximately £8,000.
5. A Member asked whether any calculations were carried out to look at the wider cost to the authority and the increased demand on adult social care as a result of the new operating model. Mr Peerbux said the preventive work of the wardens was extremely valued but proving prevention was difficult and would be a key part of the work going forward which included a new case management system.
6. Members expressed concern for the amount of time wardens would spend travelling under the new model and asked whether the areas covered would be regularly reviewed and monitored. Mr Peerbux said the Geographical Allocation

Policy would focus on targeting the areas of need and identifying available services within communities. The policy allowed for regular reviews using objective data measures.

7. The Chairman put to the vote the recommendation set out in the report and the voting was as follows:

For (11)

Mr Brazier, Mr Broadley, Mr Cannon, Mr Crow-Brown, Mr Holden, Mr Meade, Mr Ridgers, Mr Sandhu, Mr Shonk, Mr Thomas,

Against (4)

Mr Baldock, Mr Hood, Mr Sole, Dr Sullivan,

Abstain (0)

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision to:

- (i) Agree a new Geographical Allocation Policy for the Community Warden's service;
- (ii) Agree to implement a new model of operation for the Community Warden's service; and
- (iii) Delegate authority to the Director Growth and Communities to take any necessary actions including but not limited to entering into contracts or legal agreement as required to implement the decision.

181. 23/00121 - Kent and Medway Economic Framework

(Item 10)

Mr David Smith (Economic Advisor) was in attendance for this item.

1. The Chair, Mr Sandhu, left the meeting and the Vice-Chair, Mr Brazier took the chair.
2. Mr Murphy introduced the item and explained that Kent and Medway leaders agreed in 2021 to replace the Renewal Resilience Plan with an economic framework. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) would close at the end of March 2024 and be replaced by alternative arrangements in Kent and Medway. The Kent and Medway Economic Framework would fulfil this expectation.
3. Mr Smith introduced the report and explained the framework would develop the Council's economic strategy up to 2030 and extensive consultation had taken place with partners across Kent and Medway.
4. A Member asked about the closure of LoCASE (Low Carbon Across the South East) and the introduction of the Low Carbon Kent programme and Mr Smith explained that a key theme of the strategy was net zero and transforming Kent into a sustainable economy.
5. In response to questions from Members, Mr Smith explained that the Economic framework highlighted and coordinated areas for action which would be

monitored across various areas of the Council. Local plans from districts and Medway Council had been incorporated and the framework connected with other strategies.

6. A Member asked about the work skills deficit, and Mr Smith explained the Council was working with partners in the Chamber of Commerce, FE colleges and universities to develop the Kent and Medway proposal which had been adopted by the Department for Education for future funding of FE programmes. A paper would be brought to both the CYPE Cabinet Committee and the GED&C Cabinet Committee to look at NEET and issues relating to skills and employment.
7. A Member asked about the adoption of the framework by the Council's partners and Mr Smith said Medway Council was adopting it as part of their policy to contribute to a Kent and Medway Framework and each of the districts had been consulted. He said the Framework had also been agreed by the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership which included Kent Leaders, businesses, and representatives from universities.
8. A Member noted the importance of protecting rural areas of land within Kent for agriculture and strategically identifying where development should take place.
9. Members commented that there was a need for a culture change to improve education levels and job prospects and the high level strategy would need to be reviewed as partners and economic factors changed.

RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision to:

- (a) Endorse the Kent and Medway Economic Framework;
- (b) Support the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership in its implementation; and
- (c) Delegate to the Director Growth and Communities to take any necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements as required to implement this decision.

Dr Sullivan and Mr Baldock asked for their votes to abstain from the recommendation be noted.

182. 2023 Infrastructure Funding Statement

(Item 11)

Mr Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager) and Mr Tom Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Murphy introduced the item and explained that the Council was required by statute to publish an annual Infrastructure Funding Statement.
2. Mr Finch provided a summary of the report.
3. A Member asked whether it was possible to trace how developer contributions were spent on additional services and Mr Finch explained that a district-by-district analysis, available on the KCC website, included developer contributions

in relation to specific planning applications and demonstrated how funding had been spent by the relevant service in accordance with Section 106 agreements.

4. A Member referred to Table 1 in the report and asked why the Council was spending less than had been received. Mr Finch explained that legal requirements and consultations could mean that schemes took a long time to be delivered. High value schemes might be funded for by a number of developments so securing the funding for a project could take time.

RESOLVED to note the report.

183. 2023 Community Infrastructure Levy Position

(Item 12)

Mr Colin Finch (Strategic Programme Manager) and Mr Tom Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Finch introduced the report which provided a background understanding of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and highlighted some key areas.

RESOLVED to note the report.

184. Work Programme 2024

(Item 13)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme, subject to the inclusion of an item in relation to PROW.