

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### CABINET

MINUTES of a meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 25 January 2024.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr A Hills

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### **31. Apologies**

*(Item 1)*

No apologies were received.

#### **32. Declarations of Interest**

*(Item 2)*

No declarations of interest were received.

#### **33. Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 January 2024**

*(Item 3)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting on 4 January 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

#### **34. Cabinet Member Updates**

*(Item 4)*

1. Mr Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) Government had announced that there would be additional funding allocated to Kent County Council for the financial year 2024-2025 for both Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Mr Watkins expressed his thanks to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council who had been successful in their lobbying to Ministers. Mr Watkins reminded Members that there remained a £100m demand pressure for the year 2024-2025 due to demographics and rising costs, however, the additional funding was to be gratefully received and the directorate remained committed to bringing transformational projects to fruition with the aim of reducing demand, improving outcomes and reducing spend.
  - (b) Kent and Medway public health leaders have urged parents and carers to ensure children are up-to-date with their Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccinations. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) declared a national

incident following a measles outbreak in the West Midlands and London. The NHS had also launched a national catchup campaign for those children who were unvaccinated. Kent's rate of MMR vaccinations was 90% for the first dose with Medway at 88%. However, statistics revealed that across Kent and Medway, the second dose dropped to 85%. Mr Watkins urged parents and carers to review their child's vaccination records and contact their GP to book an appointment.

- (c) The Perinatal Mental Health Helpline had recently launched which also featured a text service. Statistics revealed that one in five women experience a perinatal mental health problem with 20% of men suffering from anxiety before or after birth. In Kent it was estimated that 6500 parents required moderate mental health support a year. The new services linked into the Family Hubs Start for Life investment in Kent and Mr Watkins expressed his delight in the rollout of the provision available to Kent families.
- (d) Mr Watkins and the Leader of the Council visited the charity-based organisation, Spadework. The charity enabled adults with learning disabilities to develop their independence through a wide range of opportunities. Facilities at the site included a woodwork shop, café, kitchen and garden centre. Mr Watkins commented on the warm welcome received by all encountered.

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

- (a) The new Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services, Ingrid Crisan, had joined Kent County Council, having brought with her a wealth of knowledge and experience from her previous role at Medway Council. Mrs Chandler expressed her thanks to Carolann James, interim Director of Operational Integrated Children's Services who would remain with the service to oversee the implementation of the Family Hub work.
- (b) The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) completed its focussed visit inspection at the Canterbury and Folkestone & Hythe sites. The inspection was carried out under the topic of the Front Door Service and focussed on Child in Need, Child Protection, Children's entry into Care and 16 -17 year old people who presented as homeless. The findings from the visit were due to be published on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024 and the outcome would be shared with Members.

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

- (a) The first progress review of Kent's Special Educational Improvement Plan, the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP), took place in November 2023 and feedback was received in January 2024 from the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE). The letter recognised the considerable work of staff and partners and provided confirmation that KCC had met its commitment to provide a clear plan for improvement, backed up by a permanent, suitably trained, SEND Casework team for sufficient capacity to deliver the service. The review also highlighted the increased evidence of stronger governance and strategic oversight. Mr Love advised that the enhanced relationship with

schools had started to positively impact on pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), with improved educational outcomes that were higher than the national average. Mr Love acknowledged that whilst further work needed to be done, he was confident that the Improvement Plan would provide the changes required to ensure a long term, sustainable future for all children and young people with SEND, whilst simultaneously protecting the interest of Kent's Council Tax payer, through the application of best value for money in the Council's education service.

(b) Mr Love attended the GCSE awards and presentation evening at Dover Grammar School for Girls and reiterated the inspirational words spoken by guest speaker, Her Honour Judge Catherine Moore, who urged the students not to impose their own limitations on their ambitions and acknowledged that even in a world more mindful than ever of inequality, there were still glass ceilings, and students should never be held back by a glass mirror.

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

(a) Comparative data on potholes and general enquiries between December 2022 and 2023 highlighted the following:

Enquiry	2022	2023
Pothole enquiries	2480	2718
Drainage enquiries	706	947
Insurance enquiries	170	339
Street work permits	1262	9337

(b) Road Minister, Guy Opperman, attended Aylesford depot to launch Government's consultation on increased fines for utility companies. The consultation sought to improve traffic flow and fine companies in breach of overrun street works.

(c) The EU Entry/Exit system (EES) was expected to come into force from October 2024. Work was ongoing with the Department for Transport (DfT), including the creation of a number of Task and Finish Groups, to address traffic management enforcement, legislation and welfare, which would be meeting on a regular basis throughout the year, alongside a Steering Group. With no option for advanced registration, all travellers from non-EU countries would be required to register onto the EES prior to travel, creating possible congestion around the port of Dover. A Parliamentary enquiry was due to take place on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 which the Leader of Kent County Council would be attending.

(d) Inflation amongst other pressures continued to impact the viability of Kent's local bus services. The cost of operating buses had significantly risen since the Covid-19 pandemic with driver, vehicle and vehicle spare part costs driven by inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. Whilst Kent County Council had previously utilised DfT funding, the scope for further interventions was

severely limited. Dependent on the level of change, more services would likely be withdrawn without the financial resources to support them. Mr Baker advised that the future of public transport needed to be addressed.

5. Mr Hills, Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment, Provided an update on the following:
  - (a) Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway had gained momentum . A number of meetings were scheduled to take place over the coming weeks to progress the next stage of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in Kent and Medway.
  - (b) Biodiversity Net Gain was due to come into force from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024, with at least 10% of planned development land being reserved for nature.
  - (c) The consultation on Windmills was due to conclude on 29<sup>th</sup> January. Over 1500 responses had been received to date. Mr Hills urged the public to submit their response to the consultation.
  
6. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Growth and Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
  - (a) At the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> January, a number of papers were presented for consideration:
    - 23/00121 – Kent and Medway Economic Framework – which would replace the Renewal and Resilience Plan
    - 2023 Infrastructure Funding statement – an annual and statutory report setting out the financial position in relation to Developer Contributions
    - Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) positionMr Murphy thanked the officers for their work.
  
  - (b) Visit Kent had produced an Impact Study for 2022 which highlighted the following statistics:
    - There were 61 million combined day and overnight trips to the county (18% increase on 2021)
    - The visitor economy in 2022 was estimated to be worth £3.7billion (£4.1b in 2019)
    - There were 74,462 jobs within the tourism sector (10% of the total employment of Kent and an increase of 27% compared to 2021)
  
  - (c) Thanks and recognition was paid to Mr Steve Grimshaw and his team on the No Use Empty Scheme, with the following work noted:
    - The site on London Road in Deal was under refurbishment for residential accommodation.
    - The former Age and Son building in Ramsgate had been re-opened for community activity.

- The Baptist Church in Deal was undergoing renovation for high level residential accommodation.
- Conservation Road in Broadstairs provided 10,000 square foot of residential space, a site that had been empty for seven years
- 24 commercial units at Honeywood Parkway had been sold, which provided 70000 square meters of space.

The total investment into the economy was £4.5m.

7. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:
- (a) Death registration appointments had increased. The service generally offered over 800 appointments per week with availability kept under review and increased where necessary in line with Kent County Council's winter planning.
  - (b) Mrs Bell visited the temporary Folkestone library whereby visitors had access to heritage and local study collections with the availability of public computers. The service had been well received by customers. However, work was underway with potential stakeholders regarding the long-term future of Folkestone library.
  - (c) Mrs Bell had also visited the Quarrywood site of the Libraries, Registration and Archive service which supported deliveries to residential homes, records management and the accessibility of materials to visually impaired residents.
  - (d) The Kent History and Library Centre along with Maidstone library housed Kent's archives and local history collection, along with extensive resources available to the community. Maidstone library was also a Business and Intellectual Property Centre, assisting entrepreneurs with creative ideas.
  - (e) Major works were underway at Dover Discovery Centre, however the temporary library, located at Dover Gateway was open and had been well received by customers.
  - (f) The winter mini reading challenge which encouraged children to keep up their reading habits over the winter holidays was due to conclude on 19<sup>th</sup> February.
  - (g) The Coroner service had moved to its bespoke facilities at Oakwood House in December 2023. The response received from staff was positive, with positive feedback also received from families who were going through a very difficult time.
  - (h) Following media coverage concerning the closure of KCC libraries, Mrs Bell issued a statement confirming that despite the financial pressures faced by the Council, there were no plans currently underway to close libraries across the county. KCC would continue to monitor and review the library services to ensure they were sustainable in the future and would be looking at all the options available, including the possibility of working with Parish Councils who had expressed an interest in running a library and KCC were looking at ways to support this.

- (i) Government had welcomed the recommendations proposed by Baroness Sanderson following an independent review on library services across England. The review would help to inform governments strategy on libraries which was due to be published later in the year.

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

- (a) The Council continued to receive a high number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests (34% increase on figures from 2022). However, thanks and recognition was given to the team for their ability to maintain performance standards whilst operating with the same level of resource despite increased pressure.
- (b) The number of calls received by the Contact Centre had fallen, which was indicative of the degree of work that had been done around improved communication and the availability of information to residents.
- (c) The target rate for answering calls was exceptional with priority calls answered in less than half a minute (a target of two minutes) and overall daytime response times were answered within one minute (a target of five minutes). Mr Jeffrey highlighted the exceptional performance of the service.

There had been a decrease in the number of enquiries concerning Highways and Transport due to the proactive work that had been done in the service to improve communication. The level of complaints received within the Children's, Young people and Education directorate had also reduced, due to the extensive work undertaken by the service.

- (d) There were currently seven live consultations which had to date received 3200 responses.

9. The Leader thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates.

### **35. Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring Report - November 2023-2024** (Item 5)

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

1. Mr Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) introduced the November 2023-2024 budget monitoring report. The overall forecast position as at 30 November 2023 was a revenue overspend of £32.1m, an improvement of £3.5m since last reported to Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The forecast overspend represented 2.4% of the total revenue budget and continued to present a significant forecast overspend in Adult Social Care & Health totalling £29.7m, and in Children's, Young People and Education totalling £29.5m before management action. Planned management action had been identified across all directorates of £25.6m and restrictions to spend had been communicated across the Council with clear guidance and additional approvals

required for high value purchases and staff recruitment. The impact of spending controls continued to be closely monitored and reviewed every Monday however, the current position was a considerable challenge and presented the need for alternative solutions to be found to balance the budget for 2023-2024, including the possible use of reserves. It was essential that the identified management action was delivered as planned to minimise the need to use reserves and balance the budget by the end of the year. The budget reserve was £12m; any further use of reserves would weaken the Council's financial resilience and increase the requirement to replenish reserves in the future years. A majority of the management actions related to one-off measures which would not flow through to the 2024-2025 budget position. A full monitoring report setting out the position as of 31 December 2023 would be presented to Cabinet in March 2024.

2. Mr Shipton emphasised that the change in the overall forecast would include the delivery of the management actions along with any movement of costs for the remainder of the year.
3. RESOLVED to agree to the recommendations as outlined in the report.

### **36. Revised Draft Revenue Budget 2024-25 and 2024-27 Medium Term Financial Plan, Draft Capital Programme 2024-34 and Treasury Management Strategy**

*(Item 6)*

*Dave Shipton (Head of Finance, Policy, Strategy and Planning) and Ben Watts (General Counsel) was in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) introduced the item and highlighted the degree of lobbying that had been done through both the County Councils Network (CNN) and MPs which culminated in government providing additional funding to Kent County Council of circa £11m. Whilst we were extremely grateful, work still needed to be done to achieve the savings as identified through the management action plan to balance the budget. Mr Oakford thanked the officers, Cabinet Members and staff throughout the organisation in reducing the budget gap by £118m, however, further work needed to be done. The draft budget had been through the democratic process of Cabinet Committees, Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet with the final budget due to be presented to County Council on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.
2. Mr Shipton advised that the additional funding that had been granted to Kent County Council was circa £11.5m – £12.8m, however this would be allocated according to the Adult Social Care Relative Needs Formula and Council Tax Equalisation and would not be confirmed until publication of the final local government finance settlement. The final draft budget would be amended to reflect the additional allocation from government alongside any changes in the final grant and tax base notifications. The final draft was due to be published on 9 February 2024.

3. Mr Shipton reminded Members that prior to the funding announcement from Government, the Council had a funding gap of £85m. The additional funding would help to reduce the gap by 12%-15%, however, a significant amount of savings still needed to be achieved to balance the budget.
4. An All-Member Briefing was scheduled to take place on 13 February ahead of County Council on 19 February.
5. The Leader highlighted the extensive process that had taken place in the production of the budget proposals and welcomed the Government's announcement; however, the long-term pressures still remained and one-off measures were not a sustainable solution to address the challenges that were prevalent in the 2024-2025 budget. The Leader addressed the emphasis from Government concerning the efficiencies of Councils and said that it was an important opportunity to emphasise the work that Kent County Council were already doing within this area, particularly in relation to Objective 4 in Securing Kent's Future and reshaping the Council to ensure it functioned as effectively and efficiently as possible.
6. Mr Watts (General Counsel) advised that there were no formal amendments to the budget. Cabinet Members were reminded that there had been a number of requests for additional information throughout the course of the Cabinet Committee and Scrutiny Committee meetings which would need to be actioned. This was essential in demonstrating that the administration had taken into account all the concerns prior to the final proposal being agreed at County Council on 19 February 2024. A significant amount of decision making would be needed from a political perspective and Cabinet Members would need to be working closely with Officers to ensure preparation for those decisions following the outcome of County Council were underway. Mr Oakford confirmed that all comments and questions from the Scrutiny Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> January would be collated and responded to.
7. Further to comments and questions from Members, it was noted:
  - Members commented on the commitment of the Directors to achieve the savings within the 2023-2024 budget and whilst the individual management actions could be perceived as considerably small, as a collective the savings achieved were considerable and indicative of the recognition throughout the organisation as to what was required to make lasting changes.
  - Members commented on the need to work collegially with opposition groups in bringing forward alternative budget proposals and identify solutions to the financial challenges faced by the Council.
8. RESOLVED to agree to the recommendations as outlined in the report.



**37. 23/00105 - Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-28**  
(Item 7)

*Nick Abrahams, Assistant Director of Education – West Kent and Christine McInnes Director of Education and SEN were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Love (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) introduced the report which set out the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2024-2028. The Kent Commissioning Plan (KCP) was a live document which would undergo regular review to ensure Kent could continue to meet its responsibility for education provision in line with the forecast local plans and decisions made by the District, Borough and City councils. The KCP also detailed the national direction of travel and highlighted the ambition for schools to either join or form Multi-Academy Trusts due to the benefits that were inherent to schools in being part of a family of education providers. Mr Love thanked all those involved who had helped to shape the KCP.
2. Mr Abrahams advised that whilst there had been a slight increase in the number of births for 2022 compared to 2021, there had been 1000 fewer in 2022 compared to 2018 and almost 2000 fewer compared to the birth peak in 2012. Within the primary phase, from Reception class upward, there was sufficient provision across the county; however, demand was expected to rise in five years' time, largely within the rural areas due to the number of new housing developments coming to fruition. With regard to secondary school places, the population bulge from the 2012 birth peak was moving through the secondary school system with some areas of Kent expected to experience a deficit of places which would require commissioning action; these areas included Maidstone, Gravesham and Longfield. Much of the change in commissioning needs within education provision would be driven by the rate of house builds and people moving in and around the county as opposed to changes in birth rates.
3. The Leader commented on the importance of Developer Contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in response to the anticipated demand in growth and ensuring funding was available.
4. Further to comments and questions from Members, it was noted:
  - That the Council would need to remain mindful of the changes proposed by a Labour government, concerning the introduction of charging VAT on Independent school fees. Members highlighted the potential impact this would have on public sector schools as parents unable to afford the increased costs could seek to move their child into state owned schools, thus impacting on availability of places. The proposed Labour policy could also negatively impact the smaller independent schools, where a slight change in pupil numbers could make the schools unviable and therefore cause them to close. It was also noted that there could be a disproportionate number of pupils with SEND moving into public sector schooling, which would place additional pressure on the Council to find appropriate provision quickly.

5. RESOLVED to agree to the recommendations as outlined in the report.

**38. 23/00107 - Kent SEND Sufficiency Plan 2023**

*(Item 8)*

David Adams (Assistant Director Education (South Kent) *and* Christine McInnes, (Director of Education and SEN) *were in attendance for this item.*

1. Mr Love (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) introduced the report and advised Members that this was the first time that the Council had produced a Sufficiency Plan for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision. Whilst the Kent Commissioning Plan (KCP) for Education Provision had included a section on SEN, this document contained a detailed analysis to help inform and support SEND educational provision in the longer-term.
2. Mr Adams advised that the Sufficiency Plan had proven to be an effective tool that aided clarity and transparency around the future demand of SEN provision. The plan would enable better planning of local need via local solutions and was stringently linked to the KCP in regards to the capital programme and the commissioning recommendations. The plan also included a number of recommendations around further improvement and the associated activity to support this. Mr Adams noted that whilst responses to the consultation of the plan had been limited, they were generally supportive, particularly in relation to helping partners inform their planning.
3. Further to comments and questions from Members, it was noted:
  - The Sufficiency Plan would take into consideration the recent review of Early Years education provision in Kent which was presented to the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee in January 2024.
  - The Leader noted the importance of the Sufficiency Plan in relation to the Safety Valve work.
4. RESOLVED to agree to the recommendations as outlined in the report.

**39. Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024 - 2029**

*(Item 9)*

*Florah Shiringo (Assistant Director, Integrated Childrens Services) Serine Annan-Veitch (Projects & Partnership Manager, Domestic Abuse) and Iona Hunter-Whitehouse (Domestic Abuse Senior Project Officer, Projects & Partnerships Team) were in attendance for this item.*

1. Ms Shiringo, Ms Annan-Veitch and Ms Hunter-Whitehouse introduced the report and presented a series of slides which set out the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy. Following final approval of the Strategy, the next stage of work

included the creation of the delivery plan which would support the commitments within the strategy and monitor outcomes. Progress would be reported to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on a yearly basis with additional representation to Cabinet when required.

2. The Leader commented on the strategy's recognition of support required from the early stages of prevention through to recovery.
3. Members commented on the collaborative work between partner organisations and the importance of recognising domestic abuse as a shared responsibility, which was reflected in the partnership strategy.
4. RESOLVED to agree to the recommendations as outlined in the report.