

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the County Council held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 12 September 2024.

PRESENT: Mr B J Sweetland (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mr M Baldock, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr D Beaney, Mrs C Bell, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr A Booth, Mr A Brady, Mr D L Brazier, Mr S R Campkin, Mr T Cannon, Miss S J Carey, Sir Paul Carter, CBE, Mrs S Chandler, Mr N J D Chard, Mr I S Chittenden, Mrs P T Cole, Mr P Cole, Mr G Cooke, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr M C Dance, Ms M Dawkins, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr M Dendor, Mr R W Gough, Ms K Grehan, Ms S Hamilton, Ms J Hawkins, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr A R Hills, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Mr B H Lewis, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr R A Marsh, Mrs M McArthur, Mr J P McInroy, Ms J Meade, Mr J Meade, Mr D Murphy, Mr P J Oakford, Mr J M Ozog, Ms L Parfitt, Mr C Passmore, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson, Mr D Robey, Mr T L Shonk, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr R J Thomas, Mr D Watkins, Mr S Webb, Mr J Wright and Ms L Wright

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

245. Apologies for Absence
(Item 1)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Mr Baker, Mr Broadley, Ms Constantine, Mrs Game, Mrs Hohler, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lehmann, Mr Manion, Mr Ross, Mr Sandhu, Mr Simkins, Mr Sole, and Mr Whiting.

Mr Jeffrey reported apologies from Mr Collor.

246. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
(Item 2)

Ms Meade declared that she was a carer.

Mr Jeffrey declared, in relation to Item 14 – *Motion for Time Limited Debate 1 Protecting Kent from hostile election interference* – that he was a retired member of the Association of Electoral Administrators.

247. Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 and, if in order, to be approved as a correct record
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 July 2024 be approved as a correct record.

248. Corporate Parenting Panel - Minutes for noting
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 4 June 2024 be noted.

249. Chairman's Announcements - Tributes
(Item 5)

- 1) The Chairman announced the sad news of the death of Mr Peter Harman, the Council's elected Member for the division of Swanscombe and Greenhithe, who died unexpectedly on Thursday 22 August. Mr Harman represented Swanscombe and Greenhithe for 11 years, and was also a long-standing Town Councillor, Parish Councillor and Dartford Borough Councillor. During his time at KCC, Mr Harman served on Corporate Parenting Panel, Planning Applications Committee, and Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee. The Chairman said he was a respected and popular Member who would be sorely missed.
- 2) The Chairman invited Members to speak and tributes were made by Mr Hood, Mr Chittenden on behalf of Mr Sole, Ms Grehan, Mr Gough, Mr Kite, and Mr Chard.
- 3) The Chairman advised Members of the sad passing of Mr Peter Morgan who served on the Council approximately twenty years ago and was Chairman of the Council in 1996.
- 4) The Chairman invited Members to speak and tributes were made by Mrs Dean, Mr Wright, Mr Brady, Mr Baldock, and Sir Paul Carter.
- 5) Mr Sweetland proposed, and Mr Ridgers seconded, that the Council formally record the sense of loss it feels on the sad passing of Mr Peter Harman and Mr Peter Morgan and extends to their families and friends its heartfelt sympathy to them in their sad bereavements.

Agreed unanimously.

- 6) The Chairman held a one-minute silence in memory of Mr Harman and Mr Morgan.

250. Questions
(Item 6)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 15 questions were submitted by the deadline and 14 questions were put to the Executive as a questioner had given apologies. 11 questions were asked and replies given. A record of all questions put and answers given at the meeting is available [online](#) with the papers for this meeting.

251. Report by Leader of the Council
(Item 7)

- 1) The Leader contrasted the recent success of Team GB in the Olympics and Paralympics with the recent riots that had taken place across the country. He explained that the Council worked closely with colleagues in Kent Police, and other partners, to ensure that it was prepared for any threats to Kent's facilities and communities.
- 2) Mr Gough expressed concern about the government's emerging housing policy and its impact on Kent, commenting that the infrastructure to ensure support for any further and accelerated housing development had yet to be clarified.
- 3) The Leader explained that the introduction of VAT in relation to independent schools was being monitored carefully. He noted the potential impact on children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and commented that although there was spare capacity in the county's primary schools this was not necessarily the case for secondary schools.
- 4) The Leader turned to the cancelling of Winter Fuel payments, the increase in the fuel price gap, and the future of the Council Tax single person discount. He said the Council would be working with district colleagues in relation to pension credit take up as part of the Financial Hardship Program and would see how the Household Support Grant could provide further support as winter approached.
- 5) In relation to the Council's financial position and the Autumn Statement, Mr Gough said that clarity in terms of support for local government on major areas of financial pressure was unlikely. In terms of adult social care Mr Gough acknowledged the government's cancellation of social care reforms including a cap on care costs, and accepted that, while disappointing, this removed an unfunded pressure facing local authorities. He said the wider social care reform agenda remained in an unsustainable position.
- 6) The Leader welcomed the lifting of the Council's SEND Improvement Notice and highlighted Janet Daby MP's references to strengthened capacity and

stronger governance arrangements, alongside renewed commitment from senior leaders and improved partnership work.

- 7) Turning to bus transport and new powers for local authorities, Mr Gough said funding was unclear and there would be transferred risks under any new arrangements. He confirmed that the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) remained vital.
- 8) Regarding the Entry Exit System (EES) Kent Leaders had collectively written to government. Operation Brock had operated throughout the summer and was finally lifted on 1 September. Mr Gough highlighted progress in data sharing and measures to reduce pressures on the eastern docks.
- 9) Mr Gough confirmed that severe pressure remained in relation to unaccompanied minors. The Council would welcome the Minister for Border Security and Asylum and the Minister for Children and Families to see the excellent work being undertaken. He referred to the number of referrals against transfers under the National Transfer Scheme and said the gap was more than the level that was supposed to be the Council's responsibility. He said if this continued, even with the opening of reception centres, pressures would increase.
- 10) Regarding devolution, Mr Gough said there was a deadline at the end of September for expressions of interest and the Council was seeking to engage with district leaders and other key stakeholders.
- 11) Finally, the Leader returned to Team GB's success at the Olympics and Paralympics and said there was a record of 11 Kent participants in the Olympic team and 8 on the Paralympic team. He congratulated all those from Kent who had participated in the games.
- 12) The Leader of the Labour Group, Mr Brady, also congratulated all Kent Olympians and Paralympians on their success.
- 13) In relation to the recent riots Mr Brady thanked those who had worked to keep communities and Kent residents safe. He said protests and demonstration were central to a functioning democracy but violence and damage to property was not and this behaviour was not welcome in a civilized society.
- 14) Mr Brady spoke about the Winter Fuel Payments and said the Warm Homes Discount Scheme would come into effect from October, and he welcomed the extension of the Household Support Fund. He said his group would work with the Administration to ensure support for pensioners who needed it.
- 15) Turning to the new Buses Bill Mr Brady noted with concern the reduction in bus routes across the county and he hoped the Leader would engage in the consultation. He said Kent residents deserved a better service than the one they were already receiving.

- 16) Mr Brady referred to the EES and said this was an aftereffect of the last government and was a problem that needed fixing.
- 17) Mr Brady praised Council staff members who had been working tirelessly to improve SEND provision under difficult circumstances and acknowledged that more needed to be done to support families and children. He highlighted that there were families who had not been given a permanent education setting and thanked Members who were supporting these families. Mr Brady said he understood that the lifting of the Improvement Notice came with requirements and asked for these to be shared by the Leader. He hoped that with the new government's leadership the local position would start to improve.
- 18) On devolution Mr Brady hoped that the expression of interest submission would be shared and discussed with Members and said engagement with stakeholders was key.
- 19) Finally, Mr Brady referred to the new government's proposals and said he hoped the Administration was open to change, and would positively engage for the sake of Kent residents.
- 20) Mr Hood, on behalf of the Green and Independents Group, spoke about the lifting of the SEND Improvement Notice and financial repercussions relating to the Safety Valve Agreement. He noted there was still a long way to go and said it was right that stakeholders were being invited to feedback on how the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service could best serve young people.
- 21) Mr Hood spoke about the recent riots. He said everyone had a part to play in bringing communities together and he condemned those who had deliberately misdirected and divided communities via social media.
- 22) Mr Hood referred to the potential expansion of London City Airport and its effect on pollution noting that a majority of flights could be made by train. He said he hoped the Council would engage with the consultation regarding buses to ensure continued financial support and greater control for Kent's network.
- 23) Mr Hood turned to the sustainability challenges faced by Kent's councils as a result of high housing targets. He referred to the reduction in housing targets for the county's metropolitan neighbours and said this was difficult to justify when considering the number of empty homes. He said districts (which had the constraints of the Green Belt and National Landscapes designations) were expected to sacrifice productive agricultural land to facilitate unsustainable levels of housing. He commented on the cost of rent and mortgages for first time buyers and said the announcement that no fault evictions would be addressed would be reassuring for many Kent residents.

- 24) Mr Hook, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, also congratulated Kent's Olympians and Paralympians. He condemned the riots which took place over the summer and thanked Police Officers for their involvement and said anyone who had spread false information needed to be held to account. In contrast, Mr Hook referred to members of the Faversham community who had offered their support to the UASC Reception Centre.
- 25) Turning to the Winter Fuel Payments, Mr Hook said his party believed the government's decision was wrong. He said many pensioners needed the allowance to stay warm over the winter and would be in serious trouble as a result. Mr Hook pointed out that many families struggled with energy bills and suggested that the income tax threshold be raised to help working families, and dividends to shareholders of energy companies be reviewed.
- 26) Regarding VAT on private schools, Mr Hook said pressure should be put on government to see that extra money comes to schools in Kent as soon as possible, and plans as a consequence were needed to accommodate children in primary and secondary schools in Kent. Mr Hook said the Council had a commitment to build two new special schools and that work should be accelerated. He also emphasised the importance of listening to the views of headteachers.
- 27) In relation to buses, Mr Hook spoke positively about local authorities running their own bus network and said it may be an opportunity to save money on school transport costs. Mr Hook referred to the success of a community bus service in Faversham and Swale East and said he hoped the Council could do more to promote community buses throughout the county.
- 28) The Leader responded to some of the points raised by the Group Leaders, in which there was agreement in relation to the success of the Olympics and Paralympics. He agreed with Mr Hood's comments about housing and the imbalance between a county like Kent and the metropolitan areas.
- 29) Turning to winter fuel Mr Gough said it was an area of concern and agreed with some of the comments made. He said he was not completely against means testing but believed that the government had set the level too low. He said there would be a focus during the months ahead on winter preparations, considering also the increase in the fuel price cap.
- 30) Mr Gough referred to constructive engagement with government and by way of example to the Economic Strategy (ES) and the Buses Bill. He said the Council was committed to a strong, effective, and sustainable bus network. Mr Gough highlighted the uncertainty of future funding and emphasised that the Council would stand up to government, regardless of party, for the interests of Kent residents.
- 31) In response to Mr Hook's comments on community buses, Mr Gough reminded Members that, as part of the bus subsidy changes, support had helpfully been given to community and transport initiatives.

- 32) Regarding the Entry Exit System (EES) Mr Gough said there had been progress but there were also risks. He highlighted that there was a better shared understanding with government which was needed to work with district colleagues and other partners to tackle potential problems as quickly and effectively as possible.
- 33) Mr Gough said there was transparency regarding the SEND position and reminded Members that a year ago fewer than two and a half percent of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) were issued within the statutory deadline, compared to today, where the Council was outperforming the national average. However, the Leader agreed with Group Leaders that there was a lot more to do in terms of the Council's responsibilities within Kent, and also through national systemic change on which the Council was willing to engage.
- 34) Finally, on devolution, Mr Gough said an expression of interest would be submitted by the end of September and emphasised this was just the beginning of the process. He highlighted that devolution and local government reorganisation were not synonymous and engagement with Members would take place on a range of issues.
- 35) RESOLVED that the Leader's Report be noted.

252. Chairman's Announcements - General
(Item 8)

Festival of Remembrance

- 1) The Chairman advised members that the Festival of Remembrance was being held at Rochester Cathedral on Saturday 2 November. He explained that all proceeds from the concert were going to the Royal British Legion and military charities, and tickets could be purchased through Eventbrite.com.

Honorary Alderman – Mr Graham Gibbens

- 2) The Chairman offered a warm welcome to Mr Graham Gibbens who was unable to attend the County Council Honorary Aldermen meeting on 28 March 2024 at which he was formally appointed as an Honorary Alderman.
- 3) The Chairman presented Mr Gibbens with his Honorary Alderman badge and certificate and thanked him for his work and commitment to the Council and to the people of Kent.
- 4) Mr Gibbens responded in his capacity as appointed Honorary Alderman and expressed his thanks for the honour bestowed upon him by the Council.

Kent Launch of Poppy Appeal

- 5) The Chairman advised Members that the Kent Poppy Appeal would be launched on Friday 25 October in conjunction with the British Legion.

253. Urgent Decisions - Annual Report
(Item 9)

- 1) Mr Gough proposed, and Mr Oakford seconded the motion that
“County Council is asked to note the report.”
- 2) The Democratic Services Manager provided technical clarification regarding the semi-urgent and urgent decision-making process.
- 3) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.
- 4) RESOLVED that the County Council notes the report.

254. Treasury Management Annual Report - 2023/24
(Item 10)

- 1) Mr Oakford proposed, and Mrs Binks seconded the motion that
“County Council is asked to note the report.”
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.
- 3) RESOLVED that the County Council notes the report.

255. Governance & Audit Committee Chairman's report
(Item 11)

- 1) Mrs Binks proposed, and Mr Passmore seconded the motion that
“County Council is asked to note the report.”
- 2) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.
- 3) RESOLVED that the County Council notes the report.

256. External Audit Annual Report
(Item 12)

- 1) Mrs Binks proposed, and Mr Passmore seconded the motion that

“County Council is asked to note the External Audit Annual Report 2022/23.”

- 2) Mr Paul Dossett, external auditor from Grant Thornton, provided an overall perspective of the Council’s current position in relation to financial sustainability, governance and value for money and responded to technical questions of clarification.
- 3) Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.
- 4) RESOLVED that the County Council notes the External Audit Annual Report 2022/23.

257. Request for Extended Leave of Absence
(Item 13)

- 1) The Chairman proposed, and the Vice-Chairman seconded the motion that

“County Council is asked to consider Ms Bruneau’s request for extended leave to 2 May 2025 on the grounds of ill health.”
- 2) The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.
- 3) RESOLVED that the County Council agrees Ms Bruneau’s request for extended leave to 2 May 2025 on the grounds of ill health.

258. Motions for Time Limited Debate
(Item 14)

Motion for Time Limited Debate 1 – Protecting Kent from hostile election interference

- 1) Mr Hook proposed, and Mr Passmore seconded the motion that

“Council notes:

1. It is well documented that states hostile to the UK and other democratic countries have in recent years sought to interfere with democratic processes in the UK and many other western countries.
2. These efforts have often been sponsored by or organised by autocratic regimes such as Russia and China and frequently involve the promotion of false information and abuse of candidates and campaigners, often using false social media accounts (sometimes to dox, bully or harass candidates and campaigners) or attempts to hack into the computer systems of elected officials and institutions.
3. There is also some domestically produced false information and deliberately unreliable sources.

4. The aim of these hostile actors is not simply to influence election outcomes in favour of candidates or parties who will be sympathetic to autocratic regimes but to spread general mistrust of elections and elected institutions with a view to undermining those institutions and our democratic society in the long-term.
5. This problem has become more acute since the barbaric Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 which Kent County Council has wholeheartedly condemned and shown solidarity with the people of Ukraine.
6. Members of Kent County Council have noticed the organised use of fake social media accounts in the recent general election, which may have foreign or domestic origins.
7. Recent work within Kent County Council to improve members' and staff's awareness of hacking and other IT threats and ability to avoid falling victim to such threats.
8. In May 2025, there are significant local elections in England including the Kent County Council election, twenty other county council elections, nine unitary authority elections, one new combined county authority election and two new mayoral elections, the Scilly Isles Council election and the City of London Corporation elections.

Council believes:

1. Democracy requires elections based on healthy competition of ideas and candidates using communications based on true information.
2. All of us who care about democracy have a responsibility to do what we can to resist efforts to spread false information and undermine public faith in the basic concept of democracy and elected institutions.
3. We should not complacently assume that hostile actors will only be active in this regard during national elections.
4. As part of their agenda to undermine democracy by sowing mistrust it is possible that hostile actors will try to spread false information, use hacking, false accounts and other nefarious acts in relation to any public elections including local and large area elections.

The Council requests that:

1. KCC continues work to improve the council's resilience against hacking and other cyber threats through appropriate training for members and staff and any other steps that can reasonably be taken.
2. KCC communicates with other local councils in the UK, organs of local government outside the UK who we have good relationships with, and the national government to share best practice and ideas about how to deal with this issue.
3. The County Returning Officer present a report to the Electoral & Boundary Review Committee (as the appropriate Committee within

the Council's governance) updating on the above issues and outlining how they intend to reflect the relevant Electoral Commission guidance regarding the management of misleading information within preparations for County elections."

- 2) The Chairman advised Members that the motion had been amended since the agenda was published.
- 3) The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote and the motion was agreed unanimously.
- 4) RESOLVED that:

Council notes:

1. It is well documented that states hostile to the UK and other democratic countries have in recent years sought to interfere with democratic processes in the UK and many other western countries.
2. These efforts have often been sponsored by or organised by autocratic regimes such as Russia and China and frequently involve the promotion of false information and abuse of candidates and campaigners, often using false social media accounts (sometimes to dox, bully or harass candidates and campaigners) or attempts to hack into the computer systems of elected officials and institutions.
3. There is also some domestically produced false information and deliberately unreliable sources.
4. The aim of these hostile actors is not simply to influence election outcomes in favour of candidates or parties who will be sympathetic to autocratic regimes but to spread general mistrust of elections and elected institutions with a view to undermining those institutions and our democratic society in the long-term.
5. This problem has become more acute since the barbaric Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 which Kent County Council has wholeheartedly condemned and shown solidarity with the people of Ukraine.
6. Members of Kent County Council have noticed the organised use of fake social media accounts in the recent general election, which may have foreign or domestic origins.
7. Recent work within Kent County Council to improve members' and staff's awareness of hacking and other IT threats and ability to avoid falling victim to such threats.
8. In May 2025, there are significant local elections in England including the Kent County Council election, twenty other county council elections, nine unitary authority elections, one new combined county authority election and two new mayoral elections, the Scilly Isles Council election and the City of London Corporation elections.

Council believes:

1. Democracy requires elections based on healthy competition of ideas and candidates using communications based on true information.
2. All of us who care about democracy have a responsibility to do what we can to resist efforts to spread false information and undermine public faith in the basic concept of democracy and elected institutions.
3. We should not complacently assume that hostile actors will only be active in this regard during national elections.
4. As part of their agenda to undermine democracy by sowing mistrust it is possible that hostile actors will try to spread false information, use hacking, false accounts and other nefarious acts in relation to any public elections including local and large area elections.

The Council requests that:

1. KCC continues work to improve the council's resilience against hacking and other cyber threats through appropriate training for members and staff and any other steps that can reasonably be taken.
2. KCC communicates with other local councils in the UK, organs of local government outside the UK who we have good relationships with, and the national government to share best practice and ideas about how to deal with this issue.
3. The County Returning Officer present a report to the Electoral & Boundary Review Committee (as the appropriate Committee within the Council's governance) updating on the above issues and outlining how they intend to reflect the relevant Electoral Commission guidance regarding the management of misleading information within preparations for County elections.

Motion for Time Limited Debate 2 – Adult Social Care Charging Policy

- 1) Ms Meade clarified that she was an unpaid carer, did not receive a carer's allowance, her family did not receive a Kent care package, and she had no conflict of interest.
- 2) Ms Meade proposed, and Mr Streatfeild seconded the motion that

“County Council resolves to:

- Express concern about the impact on vulnerable people of increased charges resulting from the Adult Social Care Charging.
- Recommend that the Executive explores whether the potential multi-year spending settlement anticipated for later this year would remove the need to make savings in this area, which may allow for reconsideration of the Policy.”

- 3) The General Counsel explained that the original decision linked to the motion had been subject to legal advice.
- 4) The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 2 to the vote and the voting was as follows.

For (13)

Mr Brady, Mr Chittenden, Ms Dawkins, Mrs Dean, Ms Grehan, Ms Hawkins, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Passmore, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild

Against (37)

Mr Bartlett, Mr Beaney, Mr Bond, Mr Booth, Mr Brazier, Miss Carey, Mrs Chandler, Mr Chard, Mr Cole, Mrs Cole, Mr Cooke, Mr Crow-Brown, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, Mr Hills, Mrs Hudson, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kite, Mr Love, Mr Marsh, Mr McInroy, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mr Rayner, Mr Richardson, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Shonk, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Mr Webb, Mr Wright, Ms Wright

Abstain (1)

Mrs Binks

Motion lost.