

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 7 February 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr D L Brazier, Mrs L Game, Mr M A J Hood, Mrs S Hudson, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr O Richardson, Mr M J Sole, Dr L Sullivan and Mr S Webb

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs C Bell (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Mr A Kennedy (Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health) and Mr J Meade (Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr M Rolfe (Interim Head of Community Protection), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Ms K Dardry (Community Safety Practice Development Officer), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

43. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item A3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

44. Call-in of Decision 23/00122 - Kent Community Warden Service Review *(Item B1)*

1. The Chairman introduced the item and invited the proposer of the call-in, Dr Sullivan, to provide an overview of the reasons for her call-in. Mr Sole, representing the seconder Mr Hook, was also invited to speak.
2. Dr Sullivan set out the reasons for her call-in. She raised concerns that insufficient information had been provided on the impact of the decision, including how the service crossed over with other community navigator and social prescribing services commissioned by KCC. She added that an assessment of how the community warden and social prescribing services could be combined to ensure stronger outcomes was also required to fully inform the decision options. It was stated that the decision would burden other partners, including Kent Police, and would hinder anti-social behaviour prevention.
3. Mr Sole gave his reason for supporting the call-in. He asserted that the new service model would not be able to achieve the same positive outcomes as the previous model. He highlighted the findings of the Positive Wellbeing Pilot, as reported to Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet

Committee in November 2023, which recognised that socially isolated residents were more likely to require health and social care services, and that the Positive Wellbeing service delivered by Community Wardens reduced social isolation. He raised concerns that the new model and reduced staff would impact social isolation across the county. He added that the service's preventive impact would be reduced to the overall financial detriment of the Council, with other services, including adult social care, bearing a greater cost.

4. The Chairman invited Mrs Bell to provide an overview of the decision.
5. Mrs Bell gave an overview of her decision to redesign the Kent Community Warden Service. She explained that the decision was required to reduce the service's base budget by £1.06m, which constituted almost half the service's budget, in line with the Council's 2023/24 revenue budget. She noted that public and member consultation had taken place prior to the decision and a series of alternative options, including narrowing the service's remit, becoming a reactive service, reducing the size of the service and allocating wardens based on need only, with no minimum commitment to each district and cessation of the service, had been considered and discarded. She advised that the decision met the Council's financial commitments whilst ensuring that the service continued to operate effectively across the county.
6. Members made comments on the decision and asked a range of questions. The key points raised and responded to by the Cabinet Member and officers present included the following:
 - a. Following a question from a Member, Mrs Bell reminded Members that the Community Warden Service was discretionary and would continue to fulfil its emergency responsibilities. Mr Peerbux noted that the service was one component of a larger civil contingency network.
 - b. Mr Peerbux confirmed, following a question from a Member, that Kent Police had been consulted on the implications of the decision prior to the public consultation.
 - c. A Member commented that the new model was likely to impact the quality of life of vulnerable residents in rural areas.
 - d. Members noted that it would be difficult to quantify the impact of the service change.
 - e. In response to a question from a Member, Mr Jones confirmed that Adult Social Care had been consulted on the proposal. Mr Smith added that the new model's locality structure was beneficial to Adult Social Care.
 - f. Mrs Bell assured the Committee that the new model could be expanded, should additional funding be available in the future.
 - g. A Member asserted that there was insufficient evidence of how the new model fitted in with the new models of care and provided best value.

- h. Following a comment from a Member, Mrs Bell acknowledged that the Community Warden Service would be under future pressure as a discretionary service.
 - i. A Member commented that, in addition to its staff, a service which delivered positive outcomes required innovative systems and better coordination with partners.
 - j. The impact of the decision on protected characteristics, as detailed in the decision's equality impact assessment was highlighted by a Member, who asked how support would be prioritised for vulnerable groups. Mr Peerbux explained that the Geographical Allocation Policy and supporting plans for each area would ensure that people with protected characteristics continued to be supported.
7. Members requested the following future items:
- a. Investigation of KCC and partner agencies' community services involved with social prescribing, navigating and community support.
 - b. A review of the impact of the Kent Community Warden Service Review following implementation of the new model.
8. Mr Sole moved and Mr Hood seconded a motion that "the Scrutiny Committee require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee's comments."
9. Members voted on the motion. The motion was lost.
10. Mr Bond moved and Mrs Binks seconded a motion that "the Scrutiny Committee express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision."
11. Members voted on the motion. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision.