

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 17 January 2024

PRESENT: Mr D L Brazier (Chairman), Mr M Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mr T Bond, Mr N J D Chard, Mr A J Hook, Rich Lehmann, Mr J P McInroy, Mr H Rayner, Mr R J Thomas, Mr P Stepto, Dr L Sullivan, Mr M Whiting and Mr T L Shonk

ALSO PRESENT: Mr P Oakford

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Beer (Deputy Chief Executive), Mrs R Spore (Director of Infrastructure), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Ms L Gannon (Director of Technology), Mr J Betts (Finance Consultant), Miss K Reynolds (Democratic Services Officer), Wagner (Interim Chief Analyst) and Mr T Woolmer (Policy & Partnerships Adviser - Kent Public Services)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

181. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies for absence had been received from Ms Dawkins for whom Ms Meade was present as substitute. It was noted that Mr Trevor Shonk had replaced Mr Tom Cannon on the Committee.

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

(Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

183. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2023 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

184. Draft Ten Year Capital Programme, Revenue Budget 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-26

(Item 5)

Mr Dave Shipton was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oakford introduced the report which set out the updated and balanced draft revenue budget 2024-25 and MTFP 2024-27, proposed capital programme 2024-34, and draft Treasury Management Strategy. Mr Oakford highlighted

the high-level differences which had been made to the initial report considered by the Committee in November 2023. Members were told that the main changes between the initial and revised Draft Budget 2024-25 could be found in Table 6. It was said that the draft revenue budget 2024-25 was balanced, however, there were still significant savings to be identified for 2025-26 and it was anticipated that there would continue to be a draw down on reserves in the second year of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-27.

2. Mr Dave Shipton told Members that the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2024-25 announcement had been received on 18 December 2023. This confirmed that the Government had extended the flexibility to use capital receipts, to fund the revenue costs of reducing costs and improving efficiency, to March 2030. There was a further consultation on the permitted usages of capital receipts. The final settlement was expected to be announced before the Parliamentary recess on 9 February 2024 and Mr Shipton was hopeful that this could be included in the final draft revenue budget 2024-25 to be considered at County Council on 19 February 2024.
3. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) KCC only retained 9% of the total business rate yield in the county. It was said that the Council was not exposed to volatility of business rates to the same extent as district councils which retained 40%. The business rate baseline contained in the Settlement was uplifted by inflation each year. It was also confirmed that KCC operated a business rate pool with a number of district councils which enabled the pool to bear some of the risk of changes to business rates.
 - b) Regarding the saving proposal to 'End Select Committees and Short Focused Inquiries' as outlined in Appendix G, Mr Jeffrey confirmed that the Governance Working Party were looking at the potential for different working arrangements for Cabinet Committees, Select Committees, and task and finish groups within the current budgetary constraints. Members were told that there was no intention for the Governance Working Party to look at the work of the Civic Office, however, it was expected that there would be impact in this area in terms of the movement of staffing arrangements.
 - c) Mr Oakford confirmed that the Executive were strategically considering ways to tackle demand for Council services. This included a review of the ways in which statutory services were being delivered and a critical evaluation of discretionary services offered by KCC. It was said that the Council was continuing to lobby Government and local Members of Parliament for greater funding.
 - d) There was no prescribed formula for establishing best value, as this was based on the consideration of economy, effectiveness and efficiency judgements. However, Mr Whittle confirmed that a report on the internal use of return-on-investment calculations could be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting.
4. RESOLVED:
 - a) To note the updated revenue budget and MTFP, draft capital strategy and programme, and draft Treasury Management Strategy

- b) There were no proposed changes to the relevant sections of the budget related to the Committee's portfolio area which were to be considered before the draft is finalised by Cabinet on 25th January 2024 and presented to Full County Council on 19th February 2024 for decision.

Dr Sullivan, Mr Hook and Ms Meade requested that their vote against the recommendation be noted.

185. Implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent

(Item 6)

Mr Gary Cooke, Mr Oliver Richardson, Canon Peter Bruinvels CC and Mr Tim Woolmer were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oliver Richardson and Canon Peter Bruinvels CC introduced the report which provided a briefing on KCC's work to support Kent's Armed Forces community, and summarised key achievements since the last report to the Committee and the oral presentation to Full Council in 2023. The success of the HMS Kent Freedom Debate and Freedom March was highlighted, and it was said that HMS Kent was expected to return to Kent in 2024. Members were told that KCC had received notification that it had successfully retained its MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award following a rigorous re-validation process. It was said that ongoing work was being undertaken to ensure that KCC meets the needs of the armed forces community. This work involved staff training on armed forces awareness. Mr Richardson thanked the Chairman of KCC for his advice, assistance and support of the events hosted.
2. The Chairman of the Council paid tribute to Canon Peter Bruinvels CC and his work to assist KCC retain its MoD Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award.
3. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) The Royal British Legion Industries provided housing and care for veterans and their families; however, some veterans were intentionally homeless. Canon Peter Bruinvels CC told Members that various avenues had been introduced to support the mental health of the Armed Forces Community, including the Forces Connect app.
 - b) A larger cohort of Gurkha children had arrived with special educational needs in the most recent deployment. There was specific support available for the Gurkha & Nepalese population and their families.
 - c) The regular awareness training provided for front line staff, senior officers and elected Members was well attended. This training was also provided to NHS staff. However, Canon Peter Bruinvels CC emphasised the importance of ensuring that a greater number of Adult Social Care staff attend the awareness sessions.
4. RESOLVED to:
 - a) Note all that is being done to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant in Kent and agree to priorities going forward including promoting Kent County Council's status as a lead MoD Employers Recognition Gold Award Holder; and

- b) Continue to support the Armed Forces Covenant across the county and to endorse the Council's commitment to this work by engaging locally in Covenant efforts and related events.

186. Performance Dashboard for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department

(Item 7)

1. Mr Matt Wagner and Mr Peter Oakford introduced the item which detailed the performance against targets set for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Chief Executive's Department (CED) and Deputy Chief Executive's Department (DCED). 18 of the 27 KPIs achieved target for the latest month and were RAG (Red/Amber/Green) rated Green, three were below target but did achieve the floor standard (Amber), and six did not achieve the floor standard (Red).
2. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) Detailed information regarding the factors driving the underperformance of 'GL02: Freedom of Information (FOI) / Environmental Information Regulation (EIR) requests completed within 20 working days' would be provided in the Member briefing. It was confirmed that this would include further details of how policy changes and key decisions lead to increased activity in this area.
 - b) The Clerk would circulate the 'KCC Annual Customer Feedback Report 2022/23' to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee. The report would provide a summary of the compliments, comments and complaints recorded by the Council and highlight the key changes this year that drove complaints in a number of areas.
 - c) Mr John Betts would provide further information to Members outside of the meeting regarding the ongoing action in relation to the four large invoices (totalling £1.25m) which drove the increase in 'FN06: Percentage of sundry debt due to KCC outstanding over 6 months old'.
3. RESOLVED to note the performance position for the Chief Executive's Department and Deputy Chief Executive's Department.

187. 23/00119 - Kent Public Service Network (KPSN)

(Item 8)

1. Mr Oakford and Ms Lisa Gannon introduced the report which updated Members on the status of the re-procurement of the Kent Public Service Network (KPSN) contract agreement with Daisy Udata Communications Ltd (DUCL), which was due to expire in August 2024. It was said that the contract had delivered substantial cost savings where partners had a simple route to market for their ongoing evolving requirements, taking advantage of the aggregated buying power and access to preferential rates that KPSN provides.
2. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) The schools' market had become significantly more competitive over recent years and academies often opted to use one supplier across the

whole of the academy. There were 275 schools on the shared public service network which was lower than historic numbers.

- b) Funding was built into the contract agreement to upgrade any circuit where poor performance was experienced, to maintain the required capacity as partners' requirements flex and additional sites join the network.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision to:
 - a) Approve the award of a contract for the provision of network and telecommunication connectivity services for a period of 4 years, from 8 August 2024 to 7 August 2028, with the option for a contract extension of a further 3 years, from 8 August 2028 to 7 August 2031, which will continue to be managed by the Kent Public Services Network Partnership.
 - b) Delegate authority to the Director of Technology to finalise terms of and award contracts to the successful provider and to approve, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, the exercise of any extensions permitted within the agreed contacts; and
 - c) Delegate authority to the Director of Technology to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts and other legal agreements, as required to implement the decision.

188. Update on New Asset Management Strategy Development

(Item 9)

1. Mr Peter Oakford and Ms Rebecca Spore introduced the paper which provided an update on the proposal for the development of the new 2024 - 2030 Asset Management Strategy. It was emphasised that the Council was not in a position to gift property, as it was reliant on the sale of assets and securing capital receipts to deliver building maintenance and the Revenue Budget 2024-25.
2. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) There may be some limited exceptions to the Strategy, including an ongoing review into alternative arrangements for the ownership and/or financial responsibility as was set out in the current consultation regarding windmills.
 - b) The proposal to update the description of the 'Sustainability' draft aim to: "Properties are assets, and each has potential to provide economic and environmental sustainability for the budget and the communities we serve" would be considered. The suggestion that the 'Optimisation' aim description include reference to 'long-term' best value would be discussed further.
 - c) The continued community use of any disposed asset would be considered as part of the Executive Decision Making process as set out in the Council's freehold disposal policy.
3. RESOLVED to note the development of the proposal for the new 2024-2030 Asset Management Strategy and comment on the draft Aims and Approaches set out in this report.

Dr Sullivan and Mr Hook requested that their vote against the recommendation be noted.

189. 23/00097 - Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy

(Item 10)

Mr Roger Gough, Ms Akua Agyepong, Ms Florah Shiringo and Ms Serine Annan-Veitch were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Roger Gough, Ms Akua Agyepong, Ms Florah Shiringo and Ms Serine Annan-Veitch introduced the report which was accompanied by a presentation. It was said that domestic abuse work in KCC had historically been managed by Adult Social Care, however, this was now a cross-directorate area of work with involvement of staff in Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) and Public Health. The strategy had been updated following an eleven-week consultation and significant informal consultation had been undertaken. The changes included the emphasis on evidence-based decisions. An annual progress report would be developed so that Members could monitor the work undertaken to meet the strategy commitments.
2. Officers responded to questions and comments from Members including the following:
 - a) Members welcomed the Strategy and congratulated the team on their work to reflect the consultation responses in the updated document. However, concerns were raised regarding the education provision for children who have fled abuse. Officers confirmed that the Strategy recognised the importance of schools in supporting children and young people, and that further work was being undertaken with a virtual school to provide an enhanced offer. This would be reflected in the delivery plan.
 - b) In response to queries raised on the longer-term support offer for those who have experienced abusive behaviour, it was confirmed that the complexities of this area of work were recognised, and that the Strategy aimed to ensure that ongoing support was provided to these individuals. It was emphasised that the safe accommodation support service commissioned in Kent was part of a wider partnership response to domestic abuse.
 - c) Members said that quantitative measurements of activity within this strategy would be useful for the Committee's assurance.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision to:
 - a) adopt the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Partnership Strategy 2024 – 2029 on behalf of Kent County Council.
 - b) delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, to refresh and/or make revisions with the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Executive Group as appropriate during the lifetime of the strategy.
 - c) delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to take relevant actions, including but not limited to

finalising the terms of, and entering into required contract or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

190. 23/00120 - Digital Strategy 2024 - 27

(Item 11)

Mr Dave Lindsay was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oakford and Mr Dave Lindsay introduced the report which summarises the reasons and approach taken for developing KCC's Digital Strategy 2024-2027. It was said that while the Council had made substantial investments into its technology, there had been a fragmented approach to digital transformation across the organisation. This strategy aimed to coordinate the digital transformation activity and provide a blueprint linking all strategies that contain a digital element. It was highlighted that the strategy had been coproduced with staff: over 2,700 staff across the Council were invited to contribute to its development.
2. In response to questions and comments from Members it was said that:
 - a) The Vice Chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Improvement and Innovation Board had highly commended the proposed approach contained within the Digital Strategy 2024-2027. It had been suggested, however, that further information be provided as to how KCC would tackle digital exclusion as part of this transformation activity.
 - b) Whilst the Digital Strategy 2024-2027 was an internal strategy which outlined the plans to bring about Digital Transformation *within* KCC, Mr Lindsay confirmed that there was ongoing work with the Digital Inclusion Team to maximise accessibility. Additionally, it was said that the Digital Kent team, established in 2021 as part of the Helping Hands scheme, were managing several projects, initiatives and schemes to improve digital inclusion and capability. Further information could be found online at: <https://www.digitalkent.uk/>.
 - c) The KCC Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy, previously noted by the Committee in September 2023, set out initial parameters for staff when embarking on any internal or external activity that would utilise AI. This policy supplemented existing KCC policies, and any use of such technology would be carefully considered.
3. RESOLVED to endorse the proposed decision to adopt the Kent County Council Digital Strategy 2024-2027.

191. Work Programme

(Item 12)

RESOLVED to consider and note the planned work programme for 2024.