

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, 23 May 2024.

PRESENT: Mr B J Sweetland (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mr N Baker, Mr P V Barrington-King, Mr P Bartlett, Mrs C Bell, Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr C Broadley, 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 N J Collor, Ms K Constantine, Mr G Cooke, Mr P C Cooper, 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, Peter Harman, Ms J Hawkins, Mr P M Hill, OBE, Mr A R Hills, Mrs S V Hohler, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr A J Hook, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr A Kennedy, Mr J A Kite, MBE, Rich Lehmann, Mr B H Lewis, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr S C Manion, 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, Mrs L Parfitt-Reid, Mr C Passmore, Mrs S Prendergast, Mr H Rayner, Mr D Robey, Mr A Sandhu, MBE, Mr T L Shonk, Mr C Simkins, Mr M J Sole, Mr P Stepto, Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE, Dr L Sullivan, Mr R J Thomas, Mr D Watkins, Mr M Whiting, Mr J Wright and Ms L Wright

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

219. Apologies for Absence
(Item 1)

The Democratic Services Manager reported apologies from Mr Baldock, Mr Beaney, Mr Brady, Mr Booth, Mrs Bruneau, Mrs Game, Mrs Hudson, Mr Richardson, Mr Ross, and Mr Webb.

The Democratic Services Manager informed Members that Dr Sullivan was running late to the meeting.

220. Election of Chairman of the Council
(Item 2)

(Mr Cooke, the present Chairman, presided for this item)

1. Mr Kite proposed, and Mr Kennedy seconded that Mr B Sweetland be appointed Chairman of the County Council.

Agreed unanimously.

2. Mr Sweetland took the chair, made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office, and returned thanks for his election.
3. Mr Sweetland paid tribute to, and thanked, Mr Cooke for the manner in which he had carried out his duties as Chairman of the Council and the Civic Office for their support. Mr Sweetland presented Mr Cooke with the Past Chairman's Badge.
4. Mr Cooke congratulated the Chairman on his appointment and thanked all the Members for their support during his year as Chairman. Mr Cooke spoke about the many successful events that had taken place during his year of chairmanship and thanked and paid tribute to all those involved for their engagement and support.
5. The Chairman invited Members to speak, and tributes were paid to Mr Cooke by Mr Gough, Mr Hook, Mr Hood, Mrs Chandler, Mr Kite, Mr Lewis, Ms Constantine, Mrs Hohler and Ms Meade.
6. Mr Cooke thanked Members for their comments.
7. RESOLVED that Mr Sweetland be elected as Chairman.

221. Election of the Vice-Chairman of the Council
(Item 3)

1. Mr Meade proposed, and Sir Paul Carter seconded that Mr A Ridgers be appointed Vice-Chairman of the County Council.
Agreed unanimously.
2. Mr Ridgers made his Declaration of Acceptance of Office and returned thanks for his election.
3. RESOLVED that Mr Ridgers be elected as Vice-Chairman.

222. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests in items on the agenda
(Item 4)

There were no declarations of interest.

223. Minutes of the meetings held on 28 March 2024
(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Honorary Aldermen meeting and Ordinary Council meeting held on 28 March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

224. Corporate Parenting Panel - Minutes for noting
(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 12 December 2023 be noted.

225. Chairman's Announcements
(Item 7)

Mr James Williams

1. The Chairman added to the many tributes that had been paid to one of the County's most prominent public health experts, Mr James Williams, following his sad passing. Mr Williams was Medway Council's director of public health for seven years and worked closely with both Members and Officers at KCC. The Chairman said he would be remembered for his strong role, working in partnership with KCC and NHS Kent and Medway, in promoting public health and in leading the response to the Covid Pandemic. On behalf of the Council, the Chairman sent his best wishes to Mr Williams' family.

Mr Craig Mackinlay MP

2. The Chairman referred to the recent incredibly brave interview given by Mr Craig Mackinlay MP and asked Members to join him in sending Mr Mackinlay and his family their very best wishes.

Petition presentation from Ms Constantine

3. Ms Constantine presented a petition regarding Dumpton Park Drive in Ramsgate to the Chairman.
4. The Chairman asked the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to accept the petition for management in line with the petition scheme.

Chairman's Charities

5. The Chairman looked forward to supporting two local Kent based charities during his year as Chairman and they were We are Beams and The Elliott Holmes Memorial Fund.
6. The Chairman invited Ms Caroline Brinkman from We are Beams and Mr Peter Scutts, from the Elliott Holmes Memorial Fund to introduce their charities and give the Council a brief overview of how they provided support to children and young people in Kent.

Cake Sale – Teenage Cancer Trust

7. The Chairman thanked Ms Isabella Wilson (Graduate within Governance, Law, and Democracy Division), who had baked cakes to raise money for Teenage Cancer Trust.

Corporate Parenting Briefing

8. The Chairman drew Members' attention to a Member Briefing encouraging greater participation in Corporate Parenting and the Corporate Parenting Panel. The Chairman highlighted the importance of each Member's role as a Corporate Parent.

226. Questions

(Item 8)

In accordance with Sections 14.15 to 14.22 of the Constitution, 10 questions were submitted by the deadline and 10 questions were put to the Executive. 10 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.

227. Report by Leader of the Council (Oral)

(Item 9)

1. The Leader paid tribute to the Chairman on his election and welcomed him to his new role.
2. Mr Gough explained that he had intended to raise several points which he would now not address following the announcement of the General Election. In relation to the local elections, he expressed his congratulations and commiserations to those elected and those who were not. He also expressed his congratulations to Mr Matthew Scott on his re-election as Police and Crime Commissioner.
3. The Leader spoke about finance and said the Council's accounts were due to be delivered by the end of the month and the recording of an overspend was expected, albeit smaller than was previously indicated. He commented on the timing of the election in relation to the spending round and the advantage this may have on an assessment of local government needs.
4. Mr Gough referred to the Entry/Exit System and said in recent months he had visited both Eurotunnel and the Port of Dover to see the preparations that were taking place. He emphasised that significant risks remained and a consistent worst-case picture along with funding to address the challenges were required from government. He said pre-registration, if achieved, could ease the pressure, particularly on the constrained site of the Dover Eastern Docks, and emphasised the importance of communication to residents for which government and the Council had a shared responsibility.

5. Regarding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Mr Gough drew Members' attention to a recent report on the BBC which set out the position confronted by the Council where there had been a 59% rise in referrals so far during 2024 and these were still outpacing dispersals through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). There had been 816 arrivals so far for 2024 with 558 dispersed through the NTS. Mr Gough acknowledged that this was a step up for the NTS on its historic rate but there needed to be a systematic delivery plan to ensure there were not unfair burdens on the county.
6. The Leader referred to the pothole blitz and Mr Baker's response to an earlier question. He believed, considering the rate at which pothole repairs were delivered during 2023 with less resource, that a huge impact could be made during 2024.
7. Mr Gough turned to the Integrated Care System and the Shared Delivery Plan, and the debate that took place at the last County Council. He said the Shared Delivery Plan provided energy, life and reality across the many organisations involved to ensure the right outcome for people across Kent and Medway. Mr Gough paid tribute to the late Mr James Williams of Medway Council who he said was a dedicated public servant and played a vital role in bringing this work forward.
8. Mr Gough said preparation was underway for a Care Quality Commission (CQC) adult social care inspection, due to take place by October 2024, for which eight weeks' notice would be received.
9. The Leader referred to the six-month extension of the Household Support Fund and said Household Support Fund 5 (HSF5) included a focus on keeping homes warm in a sustainable way. In relation to the Financial Hardship Programme Mr Gough said the Council would seek to build a legacy and look ahead at programmes that could provide support to residents.
10. Finally, Mr Gough spoke about Discovery Park, Pfizer's reduced presence on the site and Asymchem Laboratories taking over the former Pfizer small molecule API (active pharmaceutical ingredients) pilot plant. He said that was a positive development but there was more to be done. Mr Gough explained that he chaired a taskforce seeking to address the challenges of Discovery Park and work continued on major projects of national significance. He said it was vital to build a sustainable future for Discovery Park as somewhere that provided a centre of dynamism, growth, and jobs for the county.
11. The Leader of the Labour Group, Dr Sullivan, congratulated the Chairman on his election. She joined the Leader in paying tribute to Mr James Williams and sent her condolences to his family.

12. Dr Sullivan commented on the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and local elections and sent congratulations and commiserations to those elected and those who were not successful.
13. Dr Sullivan responded to Mr Gough's point that spending changes would not take place until the Autumn budget and emphasised the importance of reprioritisation of spend and focusing on prevention and what mattered to residents.
14. Dr Sullivan turned to the pothole blitz and said for many years there had been managed decline and commented that work had been essentially sticking plasters for the problem. She was, however, pleased to hear about the Cabinet Member's focus on a pothole being filled 'first time only time' and recognised the frustrations of many residents across Kent where the same pothole was filled multiple times.
15. Dr Sullivan spoke about the recent announcement of a general election. She commented that the Conservative administration had tried to get the resources that it could from government for a long time and there had been some successes, but she said there remained a constant cutting of services and that was a hardship everyone shared. Dr Sullivan emphasised there needed to be change, a different government, and potentially a change of administration at the Council in 2025. She referred to the proposals for new youth hubs and said she hoped the youth service could be rebuilt again to help prevent young people from entering crime and anti-social behaviour and to help them fulfil their potential. Dr Sullivan expressed concern for family hubs and the subsequent wait for families to receive a referral. She said the inability to drop in to a family hub would have, and was already having, a huge impact. She also expressed concern about the Carer's Allowance and questioned how this protected the most vulnerable in society.
16. Dr Sullivan referred to the managed decline of highways and referred to Galley Hill. She said government needed to provide more funding to restore the connectivity between Northfleet and Swanscombe and cliffs needed to be restored and repaired.
17. Dr Sullivan stressed the need for the Tilbury-Gravesend Ferry to be restored and said the closure had had a huge impact on local businesses in Gravesham.
18. Dr Sullivan commented on the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and highlighted the importance of transport for Kent and a bus service that was reliable and affordable.
19. Finally, Dr Sullivan said she looked forward to Members of the Administration campaigning for change.
20. Mr Lehmann, Leader of the Green and Independent Group, also congratulated the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on their new appointments.

He echoed the Leader's tributes to Mr James Williams and sent condolences to his family.

21. Mr Lehmann spoke about climate change and said global temperatures across March and April were the warmest ever recorded for their respective months, meaning there had been eleven consecutive record-breaking months for global warming. He said heatwaves in Asia over recent weeks had killed thousands and scientists had determined that the April heatwave in the Philippines would have been impossible without the climate crisis. In India where the heatwave was still ongoing the temperatures being experienced had been made 45 times more likely to occur by the climate crisis. In the UK the weather between the months of October 2023 and March 2024 was the second wettest on record from over two centuries of recorded data. Mr Lehmann highlighted that the implications of these weather extremes were huge for the UK, and for Kent, and Network Rail had earmarked an additional £2.8billion of funding over the next five years solely for dealing with the impacts of climate change. Similar risks existed for the county's roads with sinkholes becoming more and more frequent, and they were particularly prevalent in chalky areas such as North Kent. Mr Lehmann highlighted that a recent study revealed that 83% of those surveyed in Britain wanted the government to do more to tackle climate change and said the Council could and must do better.
22. Regarding the Entry/Exit system Mr Lehmann was pleased to hear that work was progressing well at the port of Dover. He was pleased to see Mr Gough highlighting the risks and making the case for the reopening of the international rail stations at Ebbsfleet and Ashford to ease the pressure at St Pancras. Mr Lehmann said he still had a huge level of concern regarding unprecedented levels of traffic on Kent roads if the scheme continued with its planned implementation date of October 2024 and highlighted that the impact of Operation Brock was not just felt along the M20 corridor but throughout Kent.
23. Mr Lehmann referred to the Lower Thames Crossing and said this was a concern for residents in much of Swale and North Kent. He said in addition to the loss of ancient woodland the planning had not fully considered the impact the crossing would have on Kent's wider road network. He said his group, except for one, was totally opposed to the crossing going ahead.
24. Mr Lehmann congratulated those who were successful in recent local elections and gave commiserations to those who had lost their seats. He paid tribute to the new Leader of Maidstone Borough Council who, he said, had campaigned tirelessly on green issues in Maidstone for nearly two decades and wished his team well in coalition with the Liberal Democrat Group.
25. Mr Hook, Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group, also paid tribute to Mr James Williams.

26. Mr Hook said that his group welcomed the general election and said consideration should be given to all parties and candidates in relation to local government including financing for the vulnerable, and autonomy and local decision making for large counties like Kent. Mr Hook also commented on the bravery and courage shown by Mr Craig Mackinlay.
27. Mr Hook turned to the Entry/Exit System and commented that its seriousness was not fully appreciated. He said there were real risks of Kent being gridlocked, of people's time being wasted and a vast amount of money being spent to mitigate it. He said 70million euros had been spent by Eurotunnel that could have been invested in something else and huge sums spent by government to create more lorry parks. Mr Hook explained that it was predicted that the time for border checks would be increased from one minute to six minutes. He commented that the EES had been coming into effect from European legislation made in 2017 and was supported by the then UK government. Mr Hook submitted that it was not enough to seek to delay the EES, but that it should be avoided entirely. He said there was confusion felt by some about the EES and explained that it involved registration in advance and biometric checks, and he referred to the lack of space. Mr Hook noted that this was happening on all the external borders and not just the British border.
28. The Leader thanked the opposition leaders for their comments and responded to a few of the points that were made.
29. In response to Dr Sullivan's comments about the pothole blitz Mr Gough made clear that it was not the sum total of the response to the situation on the county's roads and wider surface patching would aim to give durable and effective solutions.
30. The Leader agreed with Dr Sullivan that an argument to government, of whatever party, for more resources would always be put. He said any future government had to tackle a series of structural flaws that were driving unsustainable levels of spending, whether that be adult social care, children's social services, or special educational needs. Mr Gough said that his expectations, whatever may happen in the General Election, were not optimistic due to the limitations of available funding and a need for it to be deployed more effectively.
31. Regarding comments made about BSIP, Mr Gough noted the amount of good the Council had been able to achieve and the huge difference it had made particularly in relation to school routes.
32. Mr Gough agreed with Mr Hook that autonomy from government was required and said the Council had always strongly argued the case for devolution which along with reform on spending could make a real difference to how the Council operated.
33. Mr Gough reinforced the view that the Entry/Exit System posed some huge challenges and said a great deal of work was taking place. He said it was an

opportunity to address longstanding issues which had for many years impacted residents, businesses, and the visitor economy. Mr Gough said he was grateful to Mr Lehmann for his comments regarding Eurostar and said the Council was seeking to influence all potential providers to ensure the international stations at Ashford and Ebbsfleet were brought back into operation. Mr Gough acknowledged Mr Hook's point regarding the challenge of constrained space and juxtaposed controls at the points of exit and said the case for greater pre-registration away from the most constrained site was being argued but there was an enormous amount of work to be done.

34. Finally, the Leader endorsed the tributes made to Mr Craig Mackinlay and noted the importance of recognising all Members as people who wished to contribute to, and who work together for, the county and residents of Kent.
35. RESOLVED that the Leader's Report be noted.

228. Pay Strategy
(Item 10)

1. Mr Oakford proposed, and Mr Gough seconded the motion that:

"County Council is asked to agree the recommendation from Personnel Committee to the proposed model and transition approach for implementation to commence from 1 April 2025."
2. The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1.
3. RESOLVED that the County Council agrees the recommendation from Personnel Committee to the proposed model and transition approach for implementation to commence from 1 April 2025.

229. Local Transport Plan update
(Item 11)

1. Mr Baker proposed, and Mr Robey seconded the motion that

"County Council is asked to note the progress on development of LTP5 and its expected return to County Council for a vote on its adoption following a summer public consultation exercise."
2. Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1.
3. RESOLVED that the County Council notes the progress on development of LTP5 and its expected return to County Council for a vote on its adoption following a summer public consultation exercise.

230. Standards - Kent Code Update
(Item 12)

1. Mr Kite proposed, and Mr Jeffrey seconded the motion that

“County Council is asked to agree the changes to the Kent Code of Member Conduct as recommended by the Standards Committee.”
2. The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1.
3. RESOLVED that the County Council agrees the changes to the Kent Code of Member Conduct as recommended by the Standards Committee.

231. Petitions Scheme Review
(Item 13)

1. Mr Jeffrey proposed, and Mr Collor seconded the motion that

“County Council is asked to approve the changes to the Petition Scheme, as recommended by the Selection and Member Services Committee.”
2. The Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1.
3. RESOLVED that the County Council approves the changes to the Petition Scheme, as recommended by the Selection and Member Services Committee.

232. Motion for Time Limited Debate
(Item 14)

1. Mr Streatfeild proposed, and Mr Passmore seconded the motion that

“The Council notes:
 - a. The decision taken by the Scrutiny Committee on 24th April 2024 to disband the SEND Sub-Committee and bring the issue back to main committee agenda.
 - b. The work that has been undertaken by this council as part of the APP.
The Council resolves to:
 - a. Agree that there is still work to be done to achieve the level of SEND provision required by children and parents in Kent, and the statutory guidance as set by national government.
 - b. Agree that public scrutiny of the process has been weak which undermines assurance to children with SEND and their parents.
 - c. Recommend to the Scrutiny Committee that it establish a public Short Focused Inquiry (SFI) on KCC’s SEND Provision to:
 - i. to scrutinise the success of the APP for SEND considering DFE findings in May 2024.”

- ii. to assure Kent residents that the system of SEND in Kent will be successful and sustainable.
 - d. Recommend that the inquiry should be chaired by a member of the opposition.
 - e. Recommend that the inquiry will report in no more than six months and meet publicly at least once a month to give the correct level of assurance to Kent residents.
 - f. Recommend that the inquiry, in pursuit of its objective, should seek to explore, among other important elements, the following key issues and make relevant recommendations to the Executive on these topics
 - i. Why does Kent have 5% of its children with an EHCP?
 - ii. Is the NHS supporting a successful sustainable system?
 - iii. How are Kent's schools supporting a sustainable system?
 - iv. What is KCC doing to support a successful sustainable system?
 - v. What does it cost to support a successful sustainable system?
 - vi. Are children and parents reassured the APP will work in an appropriate timeframe?
 - g. Recommend that evidence should be taken from, but not limited to the following groups: children, parents', schools, NHS, DFE, SIAB and KCC Officers."
2. Following the debate, the Chairman put the motion set out in paragraph 1 to the vote.

For (16)

Mr Campkin, Mr Chittenden, Ms Constantine, Mrs Dean, Mr Harman, Ms Hawkins, Mr Hood, Mr Hook, Mr Lehmann, Mr Lewis, Ms Meade, Mr Passmore, Mr Sole, Mr Stepto, Mr Streatfeild, Dr Sullivan

Against (40)

Mr Baker, Mr Barrington-King, Mr Bartlett, Mrs Bell, Mrs Binks, Mr Broadley, Miss Carey, Mr Carter, Mrs Chandler, Mr Collor, Mr Cole, Mrs Cole, Mr Cooper, Mr Crow-Brown, Mr Dance, Mr Dendor, Mr Gough, Ms Hamilton, Mr Hill, Mr Hills, Mrs Hohler, Mr Holden, Mr Jeffrey, Mr Kite, Mr Love, Mr Marsh, Mr McInroy, Mr Meade, Mr Murphy, Mr Oakford, Mrs Parfitt-Reid, Mr Rayner, Mr Ridgers, Mr Robey, Mr Sandhu, Mr Shonk, Mr Simkins, Mr Thomas, Mr Watkins, Ms Wright

Abstain (0)

Motion lost.