

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GROWTH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITIES CABINET COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 11 September 2024.

PRESENT: Mr D L Brazier (Vice-Chairman), Mr C Broadley, Mr T Cannon, Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr S Holden, Mr M A J Hood, Mr B H Lewis, Mr S C Manion, Mr J P McInroy, Mr J Meade and Chris Passmore

ALSO PRESENT: Mr D Murphy and Mrs C Bell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Smith, Mrs S Holt-Castle (Director of Growth and Communities), Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Ms S Berdo (Strategic Programme Manager), Mr T Marchant (Head of Strategic Development and Place), Mr J Pearson (Head of Libraries Registration and Archives), Mr M Reeves (Project Manager), Mr M Riley (Project Manager), Mr G Rusling (Head of Public Rights of Way & Access), Mr S Samson (Interim Head of Economy), Mrs S Thompson (Head of Planning Applications Group) and Mr M Wagner (Chief Analyst)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

214. Apologies and Substitutes *(Item 2)*

Apologies were received from Mrs Binks, Mr Ridgers, Mr Sandhu and Mr Sole. Mr Passmore was present as substitute for Mr Sole.

Mr Manion was present virtually.

215. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda *(Item 3)*

There were no declarations of interest.

216. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2024 *(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2024 were a correct record.

217. Verbal updates by the Cabinet Members and Corporate Director *(Item 5)*

Mr James Pearson (Head of Libraries, Registrations and Archives) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, provided an update on the following:

Libraries Registration and Archives

- (a) The annual summer reading challenge, 'Marvellous Makers', took place over the summer holidays with over 16,000 children taking part.
- (b) The public consultation on Folkestone Library was taking place with public drop-in sessions being delivered. The consultation closed on 11 September and a report on the findings of the consultation would be produced.
- (c) The Hope Project was a free exhibition at the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone inspired by the Inclusive Arts Practitioner Elaine Foster-Gandey.
- (d) Works at Dover Discovery Centre were due to be completed in March 2025 and a temporary library service was being delivered from the Dover Gateway.

Trading Standards

- (e) Mrs Bell attended a Trading Standards Checked briefing with officers from the service. Trading Standards Checked, in partnership with Kent Police, aimed to protect residents from criminals and provided a list of safe local traders. The service also helped legitimate businesses to thrive and supported the local economy.
 - (f) The vapes team continued to be active and had in the last year conducted 800 visits to businesses where 143 were selling illegal products. Over 23,000 illegal vapes had been seized.
 - (g) Trading Standards officers had been conducting border controls on the safety of goods.
 - (h) Community Wardens and Trading Standards carried out a doorstep crime information day in Gravesend engaging with the community to improve resilience.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - Information in relation to illegal vape prosecutions could be provided.
 - The Cabinet Member would consider writing to the Secretary of State regarding the banning of single use vapes.
 3. Mr Murphy, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, provided an update on the following:
 - (a) Work on the Kent & Medway Economic Framework's five ambitions was underway including: the submission of a bid to the Department for Education to run a series of skills bootcamps to tackle employment needs in different sectors; the establishment of a new 'Strategic Partnership for Health & Economy'; making the case to government about the lack of

international passenger rail services at Ebbsfleet & Ashford and; initial work on the development of a place-based Innovation Partnership.

- (b) A Work and Health Strategy for Kent & Medway was being developed to tackle barriers that prevented people from succeeding in employment due to health issues.
 - (c) Since the re-launch of the Kent & Medway Business Fund in November 2023, nineteen new business loans had been approved and were projected to create approximately 130 full time equivalent jobs. Among recipients was an environmentally friendly dry cleaners based in Medway, a Children's Nursery in Swale, two Life Science businesses in Sandwich and arts and recreation business in Tonbridge & Malling.
 - (d) The annual Taste of Kent Awards took place on 13 June and celebrated winners and finalists from Kent's food & drink sector across 27 categories.
 - (e) The Kent Foundation, which supports young entrepreneurs through mentoring, had produced, thanks to support from the KCC Helping Hands Fund, a new free six part online course with videos, useful documents and materials to help individuals start their own business, and move from Idea to Income.
 - (f) The No Use Empty scheme had brought more than 8,300 empty properties back into use since 2005. Since April, 15 empty home loans had been approved worth £1.7m and 7 new-build loans worth £4m. A number of current projects were nearing completion including the former Police Station in Deal.
 - (g) Following a procurement process earlier in the year, Visit Kent would continue to deliver activities in support of the local Visitor Economy for a further two years.
4. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- The Kent Foundation, as part of their business plan, are reviewing the possibility of supporting entrepreneurs of all ages.
 - Kent Ambassadors were volunteers from the public and private sector.
 - Members would have opportunities to discuss the Team Kent brand at future meetings of the cabinet committee.
5. Mr Jones, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport, provided an update on the following operational matters:
- (a) During June and July the Registration Service supported approximately 650 civil partnership and marriage ceremonies, along with providing the registration service for the London Borough of Bexley.
 - (b) Green Libraries Week would take place between 7 and 13 October. Sustainability was at the heart of library services, for example the provision of 'swap shops', energy efficient infrastructure, and recycled materials for

craft activities. The event was a good opportunity to learn about sustainability and how to be more energy efficient.

- (c) The Emergency and Resilience Planning Team had made good progress with recruitment and there were currently three vacancies in the team. The main focus for the team was the impact of the Entry/Exit System (EES). The Council was the lead agency for preparations for the EES for the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum and had been working to review the risks and develop plans, whilst recognising community concerns. Internally the team was focusing on delivering Council services with minimal disruption and to continue to meet the needs of customers and residents. The team had also been implementing a new business continuity system.
 - (d) The coronial service had been successful in appointing a new area Coroner for the Mid Kent and Medway, and north west Kent coroner areas.
 - (e) Within Kent Scientific Services unregulated vapes testing had taken place and vapes were found to contain nicotine, cannabis and CBD. Mr Jones highlighted the risks involved for residents in buying uncontrolled and unregulated products.
 - (f) Within the Community Safety Service domestic homicide reviews identified lessons that may prevent future deaths. In June an online seminar was hosted by the team for professionals within the field and focused on the issue of coercive control.
 - (g) Community Wardens had engaged with the community following recent events at the Gravesend Gurdwara and the Thanet Community Warden team attended an annual event at Minnis Bay assisting with road safety and traffic management.
6. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- Libraries would provide a warm and welcoming environment for residents over the winter months to browse books and use the services available.
 - Gateway services currently being delivered at Tonbridge Castle would be welcomed at Tonbridge Library in due course.

7. RESOLVED to note the verbal updates.

218. Performance Dashboard

(Item 6)

1. Mr Matthew Wagner, Chief Analyst, introduced the report which set out the performance of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity indicators for Quarter 1 of 2024/25. Mr Wagner highlighted the seven new indicators that had been added and the four that had been removed. He explained of the 22 KPIs for this quarter 17 had been RAG rated green, three were RAG rated amber, two were RAG rated red, and three new KPIs were still awaiting confirmation of funding before they could be reported.

2. Following a comment from a Member it was agreed the target for CST01 would be reviewed.
3. RESOLVED to note the performance report for Quarter 1 of 2024/25.

219. 24/00080 - Amendments to the Highways Act 1980 - Sections 118ZA & 119ZA

(Item 7)

1. Mrs Bell and Mr Graham Rusling (Head of Service Public Rights of Way and Access) introduced the report regarding the amendments to the Highways Act 1980 (included in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) to provide a right for landowners to apply for public path diversion and extinguishment orders. Agreement was sought for the Council to accept the delegation by Kent district councils of their functions in this area.
2. RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the acceptance by Kent County Council of the delegation by Kent District Councils of their functions in respect of public path orders and applications made under the Highways Act 1980 sections 118ZA and 119ZA.

220. Playground Early Years Programme

(Item 8)

Ms L Keely (Principal Project Officer) and Ms S Bedingfield (Service Manager – Innovation, Digital & Libraries) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the report and explained that the project was funded by the Arts Council and the sessions were free of charge and were inclusive as much as possible for children from all communities and parts of the county.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - The project had been delivered well and the potential development of a five year strategy was encouraging.
 - Members expressed their support for the project and thanked all those involved in its delivery including the welcoming nature of library staff.
3. RESOLVED to note and endorse the report.

221. 24/00082 - Kent Minerals and Waste Local Development Scheme Update

(Item 9)

1. Mr Murphy and Mrs Sharon Thompson (Head of Planning Applications) introduced the report regarding proposed changes to the timetable for the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (KMWLP) and the Kent Mineral Sites Plan (MSP).
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:

- It was not uncommon for a minerals and waste local plan to have a plan that sets out the strategy and a second that sets out allocations. In the case of Kent, the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan sets out the strategy and, the current review work is proposing to address national and local policy changes since 2016. The Mineral Sites Plan set out allocations where development is acceptable in principle.
 - If the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (which was at the consultation phase) made significant changes that affected the Minerals and Waste Local Plan then this would need to be considered in future plan reviews. The NPPF is also considered as part of the determination of a planning application.
3. RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development who is responsible for the Minerals and Waste Local Plan on the proposed Kent Minerals and Waste Local Development Scheme 2024.

222. 24/00083 - Old Rectory Business Centre Management Contract
(Item 10)

1. Mr Murphy and Mr Mark Reeves (Project Manager) introduced the report regarding the next steps for the Old Rectory Business Centre in Northfleet which was a KCC-owned facility offering high quality office space to local businesses. Five options were outlined in the report and in light of 'Securing Kent's Future' it was proposed that the asset would be disposed of as a going concern.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
- The building was a significant asset to the Gravesham community both historically and commercially.
 - Full legal advice was being sought to protect the current use and ethos of the building. Should legal advice indicate that there was not adequate protection for businesses, further discussions and evaluations would take place.
 - Gravesham Borough Council's bid to secure £370,000 of Getting Building Fund funding to refurbish empty retail units and create new flexible workspace in the town centre was an independent process.
 - The income of £25,000 profit was after refurbishment and staff costs. The total income was approximately £60,000 a year.
3. Mr Hood proposed and Mr Lewis seconded that the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member for Economic Development extends the current contract for a duration of 2 years exercising the full extension clause within the existing contract, so the Council could explore all options further. The motion was lost.
4. RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development to

- (i) APPROVE and DELEGATE to the Director of Growth and Communities to extend the current contract period for a period of nine months to allow time to undertake the disposal.
 - (ii) AGREE that the necessary steps can be taken to dispose of the Old Rectory Business Centre in Northfleet as a going concern.
 - (iii) DELEGATE authority to The Director of Infrastructure, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services, to finalise the terms of the disposal and execution of all necessary or desirable documentation required to implement the above.
5. In accordance with paragraph 16.31 of the Constitution Mr Hood and Mr Lewis wished for it to be recorded in the minutes that they voted against the motion.

223. 24/00081 - Investment Advisory Board Terms of Reference and Recruitment of Volunteer Board Members to the Investment Advisory Board and Investment Advisory Board Sub-Groups
(Item 11)

1. Mr Murphy and Ms Susan Berdo (Strategic Programme Manager) introduced the report regarding the Investment Advisory Board (IAVB) Terms of Reference and the voluntary appointments made to the board, including the IAB Sub-Group and the IAB Debt Recovery Group.
2. Further to questions and comments from Members, it was noted that:
 - The Kent and Medway Business Fund was government funding ringfenced to support and promote local businesses in Kent by way of loans.
3. RESOLVED that the committee endorses the proposed decision by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development on the Investment Advisory Board Terms of Reference and the voluntary appointments made to the Boards: The Investment Advisory Board, ("IAB"), IAB Sub-Group and the IAB Debt Recovery Group.

224. Kent and Medway Business Fund Bi-Annual Monitoring - Q4 2023-24
(Item 12)

1. Mr Murphy and Mr Martyn Riley (Project Manager) introduced the report summarising the results of KCC's monitoring returns from businesses that have received loans and equity from KCC managed government funded Business Investment Schemes including the Kent and Medway Business Fund (KMBF) and the former Regional Growth Fund (RGF) schemes.
2. RESOLVED to note the report.

225. Developing Discovery Park: Sandwich Task Force
(Item 13)

1. Mr Murphy and Mr David Smith introduced the report regarding KCC's support for Discovery Park, the work of the Sandwich Task Force following Pfizer's

decision to exit from its facilities at the Discovery Park site, and the development of an action plan using local potential to meet national challenges.

2. RESOLVED to endorse to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development the suggested actions described in paragraphs 7.6 – 7.8 of the report.

226. Work Programme 2024/25

(Item 14)

RESOLVED to note the Work Programme.